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Postfeminist Spectres: What Is Haunting Television Heroines?

Abstract. Postfeminism is frequently analyzed and conceptualized as a time or sensibility haunted by the ghost of feminism that it wants to (purports to) relegate to the past. It is also a crucial concept in understanding the ways of portraying and constructing female characters prevalent in the American media. The article considers the hauntings (literal but predominantly figurative) experienced by selected prominent women protagonists of postfeminist American mid-brow television series of the late 1990s, 2000s and early 2010s, from the ghostly child of *Ally McBeal* to haunting spaces and times of *Sex and the City* and *Any Day Now*, to the multiple familial hauntings of *Grey's Anatomy*, to compare the spectres narratives assign to these female protagonists, their significations and ways of containing them or exorcizing them within the narrative.

Keywords: postfeminism; television; American television; hauntology; motherhood; women's authorship.

Introduction

There can be little doubt that the notion of spectrality remains vibrant and rich in potential both inside and outside of theoretical discourses of the twenty-first century. From Jacques Derrida's 1993/1994 publication of French and English editions of *Specters of Marx* and the "spectral turn" in cultural theory that followed (Blanco and Peeren 2013a: 2) to the contemporary

notion of "ghosting" on social media[1], haunting is a pervasive conceptual metaphor, and one that has inspired multiple readings and accounts of a broad variety of texts. Thus, it may perhaps seem redundant to even explicate its relevance to the selected scope of discussion; yet, it is my contention that the intersection of (American) television, postfeminism and narratives by and about women offers a particularly suitable ground for the application of this concept and, at the same time, represents a subject that has yet escaped the attention it warrants.

The ghostly aspect of television is conspicuous already in its name, signifying the seeing of what is remote, not here. Derrida not only attributed television with ghostly presence, one that is deprived of the "tactile" dimension (Derrida and Stiegler 2013: 38), he also predicted that the future of television is for it to become ever more "phantomatic" since one day it "will project its images . . . directly on the eye" (2010: 123). But even while it is bound by screens, both growing and miniaturized, television remains a descendant of the spiritualist séance: a medium allowing its audience contact with "presence[s]" that straddle the "real/unreal" divide (Sconce 2013: 253–254).

The spectral character of postfeminism, or of feminism within postfeminism, is relatively well-established. One of its chief critics, Angela McRobbie, is particularly strident in pointing out how the central goal of postfeminism may be the burial of feminism, its "cast[ing] into the shadows, where at best it can expect to have some *afterlife*, where it might be regarded ambivalently" (2009: 11; emphasis mine). Postfeminism purports to be simultaneously the afterlife of feminism and the proof of its demise; thus, it has much in common with Derridean exorcism—one which "declare[s] the death only in order to put to death" (Derrida 2010: 59). Finally, it can also be argued that postfeminist discourse, in a multitude of forms ranging from gender mainstreaming (McRobbie 2009: 10), to "ban bossy" campaigns[2], to ironic sexism (e.g. Levy 2005; McRobbie 2009: 64–65; 111–115) and finally, to Ivanka Trump's role in the recent American elections (cf. Nussbaum

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[1] The term "ghosting" has emerged and become increasingly popular in recent years, coterminously with the rise of social media and dating applications. The meaning I refer to here describes a way of ending a relationship through abruptly terminating all communication with a partner, typically without informing them beforehand. It has been the subject of numerous articles and widely depicted in the American media (cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghosting_(relationships), DOA May 12, 2017).

[2] I am referring here to the now famous efforts to de-gender perception of leadership skills in children that brought together the author of the crucial postfeminist text *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), Sheryl Sandberg, and the icon of pop feminism, Beyoncé (cf. http://banbossy.com/, DOA May 12, 2017).

2016), is spectral in its *zeitgeist* capacity, as a dominant aesthetic mode or "sensibility" (Gill 2007: 148), and it is that aspect thereof that I borrow here.

The spectral dimension of women's presence with regard to television is perhaps the least apparent, and one that for reason of space is only briefly acknowledged in this article. As Blanco and Peeren rightly note, "categories of subjectification like gender, sexuality, and race can themselves be conceived as spectral" (2013b: 310). However, woman haunts the spaces of television on a more basic level as well, since histories/he-stories of television commonly prioritize the narratives by men and about men (compare, for example, Martin 2013 and Sepinwall and Seitz 2016 as books which construct television canons that are overwhelmingly gender-biased[3]), particularly when the so-called third golden age of television (Sepinwall 2012: 2; 35) is concerned. The rising status of American television perceived as art form, as evidenced by such metrics as the increase in dedicated scholarship; the migration of film *auteurs* into the medium (and the rise of original television *auteurs*, who are predominantly male showrunners)[4]; and the recognition of television criticism by the Pulitzer prize in 2016 (http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/emily-nussbaum), has arguably coincided with the writing out of women in its past and present, so as to focus on "Difficult Men" (cf. Martin 2013) who produce dramas about anti-heroes experiencing masculinity crises in the changing social landscape of the late 20th- and early 21st-century United States. To a noticeable extent, the majority of even initially well-received, frequently ground-breaking and conceptually ambitious television helmed by women as producers and in starring roles has all but disappeared from the aforementioned written accounts, relegated to less prestigious genres, treated as exceptions or mentioned only in passing (see Strehlau 2016: 43–44).

For this reason, my selection of the thematic scope includes five series, of which only one (*Sex and the City*) is likely to be considered

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[3] A fruitful analysis could be performed discussing the manner in which new television canons utilize the techniques described by Joanna Russ in her germinal work *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) in order to exclude both series about women and, to an even greater extent, series created or co-created by women, but this is, unfortunately, outside the scope of the present article.

[4] Shelley Cobb, in her 2015 book on women's authorship in filmmaking, explains that "*auteurism* is still an exclusionary model of authorship. It is a term that, because of its masculine connotations, has [not] been readily available for women filmmakers" (1); accordingly, it is my contention that when television becomes "auteurised," there is a danger of this occurring at the cost of women's exclusion from the medium, give or take a few women *auteurs* like Jenji Kohan or Lena Dunham, whose presence and accolades serve to disguise the overall scarcity of women creators.

part of the contemporary television canon, and the majority of which have been largely overlooked in more detailed scholarly analysis. Of the five series under discussion, two—*Any Day Now* and *Grey's Anatomy*—were created by women, and they are also the ones belonging to less prestigious genres (protagonist-centric family drama, medical drama) and which have resulted in the least analytical attention. Although such a selection is by no means exhaustive with regard to the subject of the haunting experienced by women characters, and while the article makes references to several other titles that could easily be included, it is my goal to offer through it a sufficient initial overview of the most prominent themes and forms of haunting.

Gendering of Spectres: Women's Ghosts, Men's Demons

Blanco and Peeren state that "when the spectral presence is detected, the first, dual question asked tends to be: *who* haunts and *who* is being targeted" (2013b: 309). In American film, the gendering of men's and women's encounters with haunting can be usefully if simplistically illustrated by a comparison between original *Ghostbusters* (1984), whose male heroes fight dangerous but largely impersonal apparitions, and *Ghost* (1990), whose female protagonist needs to be saved from peril by the ghost of her murdered lover. When approaching the issue of haunting through contemporary American television, a similar opposition may be detected between stories concerning male and female characters and their encounters with the spectral, uncanny, otherworldly. Both in the series that treat those stories literally and in the ones that present them figuratively, male protagonists tend to fight demons and monsters more commonly than they come across ghostly apparitions. Some stories which centre around male protagonists, such as those of *Supernatural*, *Grimm*, *The Walking Dead* or *Constantine*, depict a variety of monsters as elements of the world, while more realistic stories, such as *Breaking Bad*, *Justified*, *House MD* or *The Sopranos*, depict addiction or toxic masculinity as demons faced by its heroes. In these texts, men oppressed by the "mancession" of late modernity (cf. Negra and Tasker 2014) confront the spectre of their obsolescence and mortality, but this horror is conceptualized in terms closer to confronting a physical, dimensional monster than a ghost. Furthermore, even the male anti-heroes who confront ghosts most conspicuously, like the eponymous protagonist of *Dexter*, experiencing visions of his late father, acting as his flawed superego, or *Mad Men*'s Don Draper, haunted by his dead relatives and the man whose identity

he had assumed to escape war, even they ultimately confront monstrosity, though the monster, as the series arguably suggest, is them.

In contrast, with some notable exceptions of action heroines who fight monsters, women on American television seem to confront ghosts excessively often, from protagonists of *Medium* and *Ghost Whisperer*, who, as the very titles suggest, commune with dead people to bring them justice and peace, to women populating Wisteria Lane in *Desperate Housewives*, whose lives are narrated for the audience by the ghost of their dead friend, Mary Alice. However, there are many more figurative (or mostly figurative) ghosts faced by the female protagonists of popular dramas and comedies, and it is those (mostly) figurative spectres that concern me here. Haunting has been central to a number of series featuring female protagonists, including *Ally McBeal*, *Grey's Anatomy, Veronica Mars, Damages, Any Day Now, United States of Tara* and *Pretty Little Liars*, to name but a few; others, like *Weeds*, *Scandal* and *Sex and the City* may also be seen as at least to some extent haunted. Returning to Blanco and Peeren: the scholars emphasize the importance of subjectivity with regard to spectres:

> [G]hosts are not interchangeable and it matters greatly (in terms of the effects and affects produced) in what guise they appear and to whom. Thus, subjectivity inflects both structural positions in the scenario of haunting: being haunted by one's father is not the same as being haunted by one's mother, one's child, or a stranger . . . (2013b: 309)

This article endeavours, in the first place, to analyze examples that illustrate who or what haunts women on American television and thus to suggest what disparate meanings these various hauntings can be seen to produce. Although a Derridean haunting is always simultaneously a reminder/remnant of the past: *revenant*, as well as a herald of "that which has not yet arrived": *arrivant* (Derrida 2010: 245, n. 39), where such a distinction is possible, the analysis considers which of the two is each apparition's primary role. In addition, whether and how the texts achieve containment and exorcize their ghosts is likewise given particular attention.

Ally McBeal (1997–2002): Ghostly Babies

The first series selected for the discussion is *Ally McBeal*, created by the prolific showrunner David E. Kelley. The series is well-known for its highly unusual non-realistic aesthetic, relying on e.g. animation to express the inner

life of the protagonist and, occasionally, other characters, whose emotions, fears and fantasies were made visible to both the characters and the audience. While the series used a wide variety of images, and Ally in particular was shown to see, among others, figures of musicians helping her to convey her feelings or a unicorn, serving as a symbol of her emotional purity, the most prominent haunting and one that the series is best remembered for is the figure of the "'ooga-chucka' . . . dancing baby hallucination" (Smith 2007: 36). The computer-animated phantom, depicted as semi-transparent and clad in a diaper, has been interpreted as representing Ally's "desire for a child" (Smith 2007: 45) or at least fear of childlessness. The behaviour of the spectral vision towards the protagonist is assertive to the point of hostility: it demands attention, attacks Ally, prevents her from sleeping and only after being acknowledged and pacified through dance does it leave the heroine alone—to return at later points in the series (Smith 2007: 223, n.40–41). This *arrivant* represents an uncertain future—Ally envisions it when she fears her lack of a partner may deprive her of a chance for motherhood—and it forcefully and even aggressively interpellates the female protagonist to fulfil a traditional gender role. Significantly, in addition to the potential child Ally might have, a second recurrent vision of hers takes on the form of her own childhood self. On more than one occasion in early seasons, Ally envisions herself as a child or young teenager, this *revenant* expressing variously her uncertainty about her role as an adult, her fear of aging and a melancholia directed at childhood innocence, whether hers or belonging to others. In contrast to the disciplining role performed by the potential baby, child Ally lacks malice; she warns the protagonist and allows her to reconnect with herself and her family.

The series partly resists a reading that would suggest putting the spectres to rest as a desirable solution. In the world of the series, an intense, intrusive inner life may be a disadvantage at times, but ultimately Ally is enriched and defined by it; to lose it would constitute a loss of self. Nonetheless, a certain containment is achieved in the narrative: in the final season, Ally's fear of childlessness is solved by the sudden appearance of her biological daughter, at an age not dissimilar to Ally's previous visions of herself as a child. The haunting thus achieves its purpose, having brought Ally full circle into a relationship with a child of her own and into the role of a mother, which subsumes her.

Any Day Now (1998–2002): Spectres of Race

Created by Nancy Miller and Deborah Joy LeVine and aired on Lifetime television for only four seasons, *Any Day Now* is a relatively little-known series, which, with some exceptions (e.g. Lotz 2006: 119; 122–127), has escaped more detailed scholarly attention. The series uses two timelines—a contemporary 1990s/2000s one, where the protagonists are middle-aged women, and the other taking place during their childhood in the times of the African-American Civil Rights Movement—to weave a narrative of two families, white O'Briens and black Jacksons, the (initially forbidden) friendship between the respective daughters of the two families, Mary Elizabeth and Rene, and social change occurring in Alabama.

The series is invested in emphasizing the significance of the past and its continued presence and relevance in the characters' lives: the spectres are primarily *revenants*. Significantly, this is established on the very level of aesthetics: while the contemporary storylines are filmed in a regular colour palette, each episode juxtaposes them with extensive flashbacks, regularly taking up between a third part and a half of the episode, filmed in a muted, mostly black-and-white palette with occasional flashes of colour (particularly blue, yellow and purple), and providing vital context or contrast. The series suggests that the past is never gone, as its reverberations continue to inform the lives of Mary Elizabeth and Rene. In Rene's case, the haunting past includes the memories of the struggle for civil rights in which her father participated as a local leader and civil rights lawyer, and of the racist violence which threatened her family and traumatized both her and her mother; additionally, she is haunted by the memory of her recently deceased father. In Mary Elizabeth's case, the haunting, in addition to memories related to the same struggle, from which she was forbidden by her racist family (including her uncle, who was a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan), takes on the form of personal tragedies she needs to make peace with: the deaths of her brother in Vietnam and of her firstborn son, who drowned in the pool when he was a small child.

The series escapes the temptation to use the past merely as a source of juxtaposition allowing the present to be absolved of guilt. Instead of suggesting that present-day Alabama is simplistically improved due to progress and racial integration, the series depicts the healing process as incomplete, and racial inequality and harms it has caused as very much present despite the passage of time. Over the course of the series, both protagonists look for and find ways of putting their ghosts to rest. In the

final season, Mary Elizabeth mourns her son and finally becomes able to move on—through literally moving away after a tornado destroys the house in which the child died. Additionally, the death of her racist uncle, a living reminder of the past, makes it possible for her to grieve again for her brother, whose funeral was hijacked by her uncle's agenda and used by the Klan to manifest their presence in the city. Rene takes over her father's law practice from the very beginning of the series, but only in the final season does she fully come to terms with her legacy as the daughter of a civil rights lawyer, directing her practice to focus on cases related to discrimination. Furthermore, the healing occurs between the two families as well when Mary Elizabeth's mother, Catherine, apologizes to Sara, Rene's mother, for the mistreatment Rene once suffered from the O'Brien family. Finally, the social dimension of making peace with spectres of the past is further demonstrated by the fact that while Mary Elizabeth's daughter repeats her mother's history by also becoming pregnant as a teenager, not only is her relationship interracial but also her family, instead of rejecting her like Mary Elizabeth's did, assists her and her husband in building a new life for themselves. The series offers closure to individuals and the haunting that is visited upon them by personal and communal history, but at the same time the past is not depicted as fully gone, and the accomplished peace remains fragile.

Sex and the City (1998–2004): Spectral Cityscapes

An adaptation of a column-turned-into-a-novel by Candace Bushnell (1997), *Sex and the City* was made for HBO by Darren Star, and constitutes perhaps the most canonical of the series under discussion here, and an example of the very erasure I discuss in the introduction. While this romantic comedy (or satire), being an example of the escapist aesthetic of 1990s abundance and populated almost solely by white and affluent women and the men they interact with, may not be commonly associated with any form of haunting, a closer analysis reveals a certain aspect thereof that takes on a ghostly, spectral character. The titular city, New York, is considered to have had a role equal to a character in the series, and thus, in the wake of 9/11, the formerly relatively carefree backdrop of Manhattan, which Carrie Bradshaw, the central character, walks through in every episode's credits, becomes the site of an unspeakable (and only barely spoken of) trauma.

It is the spectre of 9/11 that thus haunts the narrative, particularly during season four, which aired in 2002, after the terrorist attack, but had been shot in advance of it, and season five, the first scripted after this caesura (Nussbaum

2011). The series, which had previously made copious usage of footage of the Twin Towers, would instead proceed to "eras[e] them, including from the credits, where they [had been] superimposed with Sarah Jessica Parker's name" as well as from appearances in specific episodes (Nussbaum 2011), while declining—or perhaps lacking the technical possibility—to acknowledge the context of this disappearance. The fourth season ends with an episode entitled "I Heart NY," in which Carrie (and the city) are both abandoned by Carrie's lover, unnamed Mr. Big, a man who in many ways seemed bound together with the primary protagonist's New Yorker identity. In turn, season five opens with storylines that without directly addressing the 9/11 trauma conspicuously thematize the city they depict, such as the episode "Anchors Away," taking place during the annual Fleet Week and covertly glorifying the US military.

Ultimately, the *revenant* of cultural trauma lacks direct acknowledgment in the narrative, but the closure in the series remains strongly associated with reaffirming the bond between the woman and her haunting city. In the final season, Carrie briefly abandons New York for Paris, which becomes the site of her affair with a Russian artist. However, leaving the city is a mistake: Carrie cannot find a place for herself, her art—writing—proves difficult when transplanted away from the city she once (in "Anchors Away") called "[her] boyfriend," and the relationship she is in falls apart. Convinced by Carrie's friends, the quintessential New Yorker Mr. Big brings Carrie back to America, where they can start a new life together, without escaping the ghosts.

Damages (2007–2011): Ghosts as Guilt

Created by Todd A. Kessler, Glenn Kessler and Daniel Zelman, *Damages* aired its 59 episodes on FX and subsequently Audience Network. A legal thriller known for its extensive use of flashforwards and non-linear storytelling, the series is concerned with the concepts of justice and inequality; thus, it should perhaps come as no surprise that spectres occupy prominent positions in the narrative. The series centres around two women pitted against each other in a struggle with overtly Freudian tones. The protégé, Ellen Page, is a young lawyer, starting out in a new firm and gradually becoming disillusioned as she discovers the amorality of the legal world; her mentor and boss, Patty Hewes, is ostensibly a social justice crusader, typically representing indigent groups ill-served by the legal system in class-action suits against key American institutions (such as large corporations, the

military-industrial complex, banks), but in truth, she uses the legal system to enrich and empower herself, and her victories are ensured through immoral and even illegal means: bribery, blackmail and ordered assassinations.

The structure of the show relies on overarching flashforwards, shot in sepia tones, to construct its mysteries, and in later seasons (particularly the third and the fifth) the series employs fantasy and dream sequences to explore the psyches of the two women it depicts[5]. Both these devices are also used to introduce spectral elements into the narrative. In the case of Patty, the hauntings are multiple: the first ones are visions of her colleague, Ray Fiske, who committed suicide in front of her as a result of her blackmail. Later, other visions and dreams include either Ellen, directly represented as a stand-in for the daughter Patty never had (in season five), or a horse (in season three), whose significance is initially unclear, to be later revealed as associated with a late-term miscarriage Patty had induced herself after realizing that she could not reconcile motherhood with a job she had been offered. Patty's *revenants* are all associated with her guilt and regrets, and they cannot be "reckon[ed] with" (Derrida 2010: xx), or at least Patty cannot reckon with them: she can only escape into her work, the work that caused her to transgress in the first place, in the process losing her entire family and personal connections.

Similarly, Ellen's visions are primarily symptoms of her regret, taking on the form of her deceased fiancé, who died in large part due to her involvement in a case with Patty Hewes. David first haunts the viewers (as an *arrivant*) since the flashforwards inform them about his death in shots of his dead body shown at regular intervals in season one, while the characters are yet unaware of the inevitable, tragic ending to their story. In later seasons, it is Ellen he haunts, making her first become more involved in her legal work, when she attempts to bring those responsible for his death to justice, and later serving as a reminder of the cost of being too dedicated to her work, the danger of following in Patty's footsteps. Once Ellen finds herself in a situation reminiscent of Patty's early dilemma—facing an at-risk pregnancy that necessitates cutting back on work—she makes the opposite choice and starts a family. The series, in the final flashforward, informs the viewers that Ellen

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[5] Season four, which is preoccupied with the aforementioned military-industrial complex, as the suit is lodged against a military subcontractor, thematizes trauma and depicts post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans, thus presenting additional aspects of haunting and connecting it with the United States' international policy; this aspect of the series could well occasion a separate hauntological analysis, and is omitted here for reasons of space limitations.

is no longer a lawyer: married, with a child, she avoids Patty's fate of living with ghosts by focusing on the living, at the cost of her career.

Grey's Anatomy (2005–ongoing): A Family of Ghosts

The final series I intend to analyze here is the richest in haunting of all programmes under discussion. The series, the first created by the media mogul and super-producer, Shonda Rhimes, and still being produced after more than 200 episodes and 13 seasons, is a medical drama focusing on private and professional lives of a group of surgeons at a hospital that appears to be visited by more than its share of extreme tragedy. While the hospital setting naturally functions as a place of trauma and mourning—not all patients survive, and both the protagonists and the audience invest emotionally in those stories—it is also the characters of the doctors themselves, and their family members, who have become deceased over the course of the series.

Grey's Anatomy operates primarily but not exclusively through codes of realism, albeit of a heightened, melodramatic, soap-opera like quality. Nonetheless, explicitly spectral presences infiltrate its world at certain key moments of the series. To mention but a few, in season three, the eponymous protagonist, Meredith Grey, undergoes a near-death experience and is visited by visions of deceased characters, who convince her to fight to survive despite her suicidal impulses. Subsequently, one of the same dead characters, Denny, begins appearing to another doctor, his former fiancée, Izzie Stevens. Izzie's season five storyline focuses on her rekindled romance with the ghostly presence of her former lover, which is then explained away as a symptom—the visions are attributed to a brain tumour. Ultimately, however, the series undermines that realistic explanation, showing Denny's ghost in a scene where he is perceived by the viewers but invisible to the characters, resulting in a certain ambivalence—the ghost both is and is not rationally explainable.

All the same, there is another level of spectrality in the series, arguably more productive from an analytical perspective, and those are the ghosts that surround the aforementioned protagonist. Meredith is a character whose spectres are multiple: the first and foremost among them being the *revenant/arrivant* represented by the figure of her (lost/deceased/found) mother. Admittedly, later seasons compound this primal loss with numerous other losses: at various points in the series, the tragic heroine suffers a miscarriage and loses both her younger sister (in an aeroplane accident) and her husband (in a car crash). However, it is primarily the death of her mother that serves as a framing device for those later losses (in fact, the episodes in season 11

where she deals with becoming widowed explicitly associate her suffering with the trauma related to her mother) and that thus requires the most detailed analysis.

Significantly, Meredith's mother is initially presented as an almost mythical figure in the universe of the series. A legendary surgeon, recipient of fictional awards, and creator of fictional surgical techniques, Ellis Grey looms large over Meredith as she becomes a surgical intern. However, it is later revealed that her mother was also a source of shame and trauma for Meredith: an embittered and deeply unhappy woman, she abused her daughter emotionally, culminating in a scene in season three episode "Wishin' and Hopin'" where she declares her disappointment with Meredith, announcing that she would prefer for her daughter to be unhappy and extraordinary rather than happy and ordinary: a statement that a few episodes later leads to Meredith's semi-suicidal behaviour. The entire sequence is remarkably Hamletian—while Ellis is not a ghost yet at the time it occurs, her presence is arguably spectral, since she is suffering from advanced Alzheimer's disease and has been unable to recognize anyone for some time. During her lucid episode, she comes to her daughter to make a demand of her: she wants Meredith to abandon her regular existence and avenge her in the field of medicine, going into research to find the cure to the incurable disease slowly killing her mother. Also like Hamlet, Meredith reacts by experiencing existential doubt and despair.

However, while early seasons represent the mother's (living) ghost as a destructive and pernicious source of self-loathing and trauma for the protagonist, this image becomes complicated and re-framed in later seasons. After her death in season 3, Ellis recurs through flashbacks, both from Meredith's and her own perspective (including flashbacks to her internship in the 1970s), in documents depicting her surgeries, which Meredith and other surgeons watch for educational reasons, and most significantly, through her journals. Meredith inherits the journals but initially finds reading them gruelling and hurtful. Only years later, once she is herself a mother, struggling with balancing career, marriage and parenthood, does she find herself drawn to her own mother's legacy. In season 11, Meredith re-discovers the journals and through them, denied family history: memories related to her mother's suicide attempt as a result of being abandoned by a man she had had an affair with as well as proof of the existence of a black half-sister her mother had given up for adoption. This time, the *revenant* of the mother's ghost leads to healing for Meredith: the mother becomes a symbol of survival in face of adversity, succeeding despite overwhelming prejudice against women surgeons. The healing is completed when Meredith connects with the re-

discovered sister, reads her mother's journals and names her third child after her mother, thus ultimately reclaiming the relationship she was unable to have with her mother and putting her spectre to rest.

Other Stories, Other Ghosts: Conclusion

The selection discussed in this article is far from exhaustive when haunting of female characters on American television is concerned. To name but a few examples, in *The Good Wife* (2009–2016), memories and dreams of departed loved ones take on a spectral, intrusive quality; furthermore, those *revenants* become a way of exploring the main character's depression and regret. In *Scandal* (2012–ongoing), a Shonda Rhimes political thriller whose black protagonist has an affair with a white, married, Republican president, spectrality can be associated with both the conspiracies that surround the presidency, turning fictional American politics into a gothic story, and the presence of real counterparts of the characters, both contemporary and historical: for instance, when the heroine draws oblique comparisons between herself and Sally Hemings. In the suburban gothic series for teenage audiences, *Pretty Little Liars* (2010–2017), haunting is associated with technology, as ghost-like doppelganger antagonists haunt the primary characters through their computers and cellular phones, imprisoning them in a postmodern Panopticon. Finally, para-documentary series like *Feud* (2017), due to the inevitable comparison to the real people and (often documented) situations they recreate, are entirely governed by the logic of haunting, simultaneously nostalgic, critical and spectral. Furthermore, a comparison with non-American television could yield interesting results: a title that could benefit from such analysis is, for instance, the British *Fleabag*, a short series and adaptation of a play under the same title, depicting a female character haunted by the death of her best friend.

Even this limited selection makes it possible to detect certain recurrent themes in the representations of women's haunting and particularly the depiction of what those narrative spectres accomplish. The hauntings range from ones associated with children or sexual partners, as in *Ally McBeal* (primarily the former), *Grey's Anatomy* (the latter) and *Damages* (both), to parental figures, particularly mothers (*Grey's Anatomy*) as well as historical *revenants*, as in *Sex and the City* or *Any Day Now*. Significantly, the ghosts of children (whether past or prospective) and *revenants* of lovers most frequently serve to contain the female characters in more rigid gender and social roles, interpellating them to fulfil their duty to the ghost. In contrast,

more abstract *revenants*—New York City in *Sex and the City*, memories of the Civil Rights Movement in *Any Day Now*—seem more open to interpretation as either containing or empowering the women they haunt, while the ghostly figure of the mother in *Grey's Anatomy* ultimately fulfils the most empowering role. These spectres, by demanding a reckoning, ensure the possibility of reconciling with one's past or one's country's past, leading the female characters into a more hopeful future.

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Ally McBeal (1997–2002)
Any Day Now (1998–2002)
Damages (2007–2012)
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Feud (2017)
Fleabag (2016)
Ghost (1990)
Ghostbusters (1984)
Grey's Anatomy (2005–ongoing)
Pretty Little Liars (2010–2017)
Scandal (2012–ongoing)
Sex and the City (1998–2004)
The Good Wife (2009–2016)