it deserves to take its place alongside the films that it has successfully sought to revive and reinvigorate.

Oisin Vink

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TELEVISION REVIEWS

Hemlock Grove: Season One (Netflix 2013)

A young man bearing a pronounced resemblance to *True Blood*'s (2008-present) Eric Nordstrom sits in a small-town gift-shop-come-ice-cream-parlour, an excessively large cone of vanilla melting, untouched, in his hand. A raven-haired beauty arrives outside, peering through the shop's glass door in a manner that is both sinister and decidedly erotic. Their eyes meet but she does not come in. Nathan Barr's score (here a repeated violin refrain, echoing Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* with female voice accompaniment) builds in intensity. Within seconds the two are coupling furiously in the cramped confines of a blood-red Austin Healey 3000. He pulls out a cut-throat razor, only to slice his own thumb and rub his blood on her arm. "You're so weird, Roman. But I like it", says she. "Ssshhh", he replies. "You don't know my name".

Hemlock Grove (2013), the Eli Roth-produced Netflix Original series that follows is every bit as weird as Roman's haemo-erotic proclivities portend. And not everyone has liked it – Netflix viewers, who revel in its witty bricolage of Gothic tropes and devices, giving it a hefty Four Star approval rating while critics, apparently happier with the anodyne Gothic-lite of the *Twilight* franchise, have damned it as overblown, disjointed and derivative. Echoing critical condemnations of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, such critics not only betray a complete misunderstanding of the Gothic mode but do this splendid series a grave disservice. And yes, the pun is entirely intended.

Based on the 2012 novel by Brian McGreevy, *Hemlock Grove* retains its opening's air of arch good humour across its thirteen episodes which are, by turns, suspenseful, erotic, visceral, emotive, clever and camp. Here are buried secrets and resurrected children, vampires, werewolves and witches. Here is decay and rebirth, transformation, mutation and return. There are enough moments of body horror to

please the blood-and-guts brigade and a collection of extremely strong performances – particularly from Famke Janssen (as vampiric mother Olivia Godfrey), Dougray Scott (her hapless lover Norman Godfrey), Landon Liboiron (teen wolf Peter Rumancek), Lili Taylor (his hippy mother Lynda) and Bill Skarsgård (Roman Godfrey, the richest boy in the town and heir to a darker legacy). Bill is, of course, Alexander's baby brother.

Into the eponymous former steel town, still reeling from the death of heavy industry and seething with its own resentments, jealousies and secrets, come Peter Rumancek and his mother Lynda. As Romani-Americans they evoke that gypsy-lycanthrope association commonplace since Curt Siodmak's *The Wolf Man* of 1941. Taking up residence in a late uncle's trailer in the woods, moreover, they also embody all the liminality of the American poor white. Fittingly, as Peter observes upon arrival, Hemlock Grove is itself a strangely Gothic town. Above it looms the giant tower of the Godfrey Institute for Biomedical Technology, home of white-coated necromancer Dr Pryce (whose name echoes that of horror icon Vincent, self-referentiality being a constant source of pleasure in this show). It is Pryce (Joel de la Fuenta) who has brought Roman's baby sister Shelley (Nicole Boivin) back from the dead, Shelley having now grown into the series' giant teenage narrator, with a huge luminous eye and the capacity to glow eerily when touched. Within days of Peter's arrival, the body of the first victim is discovered – mutilated "lady-parts first" by what seems like a giant dog. Other murders follow and Peter is hunted, both by a lynch-mob of townspeople and by an alcoholic Gulf War veteran, now hit-woman for the mysterious Order of the Dragon. Meanwhile Olivia, Roman's sexually inappropriate Jocasta of a mother and the town's "most beautiful and most hated woman," hints at her vampiric origins while continuing a longstanding affair with Roman's uncle Norman, who runs the town's psychiatric hospital. His daughter Letha (Penelope Mitchell) finds herself immaculately with child, having been impregnated, she believes, by an angel. Later she falls in love with Peter. Christina (Freya Tingley), a fellow student, finds a hideously mutilated body in the woods, goes grey overnight and finds herself committed to uncle Norman's asylum. A grave is opened. And Peter's cousin Destiny (Kaniehtiio Horn), a grifter and part-time hooker, consumes a corpse-fed worm to better commune with the dead. Across the whole caboodle falls the shadow of father-daughter and mother-son incest.

From all of this it is, perhaps, apparent why the critics responded so poorly to *Hemlock Grove.* This is not a series targeted, as some seemed to think, at a mass fantasy audience such as might tune into *Game of Thrones* (2011-present). It is not, for all its teen-love sub-plot, a Gothic romance in the vein of *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present). Neither does it opt for a predictable linearity in the telling of its tale or a restrained realism in its realisation of character. Nonetheless, for viewers attuned to the stylistic excesses of the Gothic who know their horror history and take pleasure in texts that are playful and inventive in their self-referentiality, this is a fantastically enjoyable series. Its pacing is swift and its plotting effective, its characters well-drawn and its utter delight in the excesses of the Gothic mode is apparent at every turn. There's all the burgeoning adolescent sexuality one would hope for in a wolf-story, a hefty dose of mad science, some old-country vampire lore and some significant attention to the evolution of American society over the course of the last thirty years or so – as heavy industry has been replaced by transnational corporations and communities have struggled to adjust. The series culminates with several juddering climaxes that are impressively grand in their guignol and yet leave us both overwhelmed and crying out for more.

It is no coincidence that the image of the ouroborous (the snake that eats its own tail) peppers this series, as does a quotation from Confucius – "the end is only the beginning". In classic Gothic mode and to the irritation of its critics, the first series of *Hemlock Grove* refuses closure – leaving questions unanswered, characters unanchored and plotlines unresolved. It will be an anxious wait until the second season, commissioned by Netflix in response to fan-appreciation and in the face of misguided critical opprobrium, launches next year. I, for one, can't wait.

Linnie Blake

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Mockingbird Lane (NBC October 2012)

The Munsters returned to television screens – for one night, at least – in a contemporary reimagining written and co-executive produced by Bryan Fuller, known for his macabre-themed series *Dead Like Me* (2003-2004), *Wonderfalls* (2004), *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009) and most recently *Hannibal* (2013); Bryan Singer,

probably best known for his work on the *X-Men* movie franchise, took on directorial and co-executive producer duties. When news hit that a modern remake of the cult favourite, playfully retitled *Mockingbird Lane*, had been given the green light by NBC executive Bob Greenblatt, it was met with much disparagement and reservation. With an ever-growing plethora of supernatural programming in today's media – from friendly vampires on *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), werewolves on *Teen Wolf* (2011-present), demons and witches on *Supernatural* (2005-present) – *The Munsters'* resurrection was perhaps inevitable. In October 2012, the pilot for *Mockingbird Lane* was screened as a Halloween special, with the possibility of producing a full series if the ratings were adequate.

The 1960s CBS sitcom *The Munsters* (1964-1966) was one of the most popular dark comedy sitcom families of the era, along with their ABC rivals *The Addams Family* (1964-1966). Both shows juxtaposed zany elements and slapstick humour with classic horror tropes, but it was *The Munsters* that captivated audiences by giving them a glimpse into the uncanny world of monsters trying to assimilate into society with, of course, a laugh or two along the way. Their syndication popularity even resulted in a spin-off series *The Munsters Today* (1988-1991) and several made-for-TV films. The family of *Mockingbird Lane* is less goofy, however, and more sinister, a concoction of *True Blood* (2008-present) mixed with *Modern Family* (2009-present).

The pilot opens with a group of cub scouts gathered around a campfire under a full moon. They are soon terrorised by a "baby bear" that turns out to be Eddie Munster (Mason Cook) in full werewolf state. By morning, a naked Eddie walks out of the bushes to find his fellow scouts unscathed but traumatised by the night's events. This incident is the catalyst of the pilot; the Munster family embarks for their new residence on 1313 Mockingbird Lane, in order to protect Eddie from the dire news of his transformation into "monster-hood". This sets up the characters' storylines, in which Eddie grows hair "everywhere", his lycanthropy clearly functioning as a metaphor for puberty; Marilyn (Charity Wakefield) searches for her position in the family; Herman (Jerry O'Connell) consistently loves so much to the verge of expiration; Lily (Portia de Rossi) reassesses her parenting; and Grandpa (Eddie Izzard) struggles to assimilate with the living by not devouring them.

Fuller's characters deviate from the pancake makeup and apparel of the original show and opt instead for a modern twenty-first century appearance, thus concealing their monstrous identities – they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Fred Gwynne's earlier incarnation of Herman, with his green makeup, stiff physique, bolted square head, and unkempt clothing, was famously inspired by Boris Karloff's look in *Frankenstein* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and *Son of Frankenstein* (1939). In *Mockingbird Lane*, we are presented with a thirty-something-year-old man with visible sutures on his neck, a body composed of borrowed human parts, and the wardrobe of a *GQ* model. Likewise, Eddie's popular widow's peak and Victorian attire have been replaced, and Eddie has been reimagined as a moody prepubescent boy in scout gear; Lily has ditched the Bride of Frankenstein makeup and flowing garbs in favour of a more natural appearance and curve-accentuating apparel; and kooky Grandpa has swapped Dracula's classical style for a red robe, sunglasses, and now boasts the ability to shape-shift into a blood-lusting creature. While the 1960s versions of the characters referenced the Universal Monsters of the 1930s (such as Karloff's Frankenstein and Bela Lugosi's Dracula), *Mockingbird Lane* draws on more recent renditions of these creatures, typified by Grandpa's new attire, which clearly recalls Gary Oldman's appearance in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). Stylistically, the character that remains the most recognisable is Marilyn, the oddball. She retains Pat Priest's 1960s style and mannerisms, in a nostalgic nod to the earlier version of the show, which is also in line with contemporary TV's pastiche of the 1960s, since Marilyn is styled similarly to Betty Draper from *Mad Men* (2007-present). In the 1960s version of *The Munsters*, it was the fact that she looked human that made Marilyn the oddball of the bunch, but the rest of her family were monstrous in appearance only. *Mockingbird Lane* veers away from what made the Munsters "monsters" by making them look more human – yet they are ultimately more frightening than they were in the original show.

In the 1960s version, the characters were unaware of their monstrous identities and saw themselves as friendly, attractive and outstanding American citizens who met life with comical silliness. In contrast, Fuller's Munsters are aware that they are monsters; they are confronted with the struggle to conform and resist the urge to devour mankind, in order to integrate into a society that would otherwise banish or destroy them. This realisation deviates from the Munsters' innocent appeal. For

instance, Grandpa is seen drinking from the heart of Eddie's scoutmaster and his magic spells are no longer madcap but evil – a dark transition from the original. The other members of the family battle existential questions in their struggle to get to grips with their identities in a judgmental society and are flawed in their own way. Fuller's monsters undeniably have a contemporary and darker edge, perhaps as a way of developing a common thread with the audience; for example, an iPad is used to reboot Herman's heart, while Eddie is a vegetarian werewolf. By humanising the Munsters figuratively and physically, Fuller seems to have lost the original Munsters' playful and comical charm.

In stylistic terms, Fuller aims to please the twenty-first century audience. For example, the dark, Gothic house is up to par with the architecture found in today's TV horror shows like *American Horror Story: Murder House* (2011). Unlike the original, where effects were limited to animatronics and light shows, *Mockingbird Lane* utilises impressive CGI effects to create elaborate entrances and creatures. This technology may appeal to today's generation, but may be too slick for fans of the 1960s version. For those familiar with the original series, there *are* some homage scenes: Marilyn whistles the 1960s theme song to a black crow; a square-shaped silhouette of Herman appears but turns out to be a lantern; the entrance to Grandpa's lair underneath the staircase is shown; and their fire-breathing pet dragon, Spot, makes an appearance. Ultimately, *Mockingbird Lane* successfully manages to update the Munsters for the twenty-first century, but loses its classic appeal along the way.

It is understandable that a modern remake will alter certain elements from its original source, but in the end, it seems that too much was altered in this project. *Mockingbird Lane* is a far cry from its predecessor and deviates from what makes the Munsters, *The Munsters* – their physical characteristics, inane dialogue, and endearing innocence. The show may have had potential as a sitcom about a monster family, but ultimately, not as *The Munsters*. When screened in October 2012, the pilot of this attempted reimagining was seen by 5.4 million viewers and delivered a 1.6 rating in the adult demographic scale; as respectable as those numbers are, they were not enough to resurrect Herman and his family on our television sets again in the long term.

Silvia E. Herrera

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Hannibal: Season One (NBC 2013)

When first announced by NBC in 2011, the television series *Hannibal* seemed to be set on mining the twice-adapted Thomas Harris novel *Red Dragon* for inspiration, drawing on the margins of the story in order to explore the earlier years of Hannibal Lecter's relationship with the brilliant but damaged profiler Will Graham. For those who continue their devotion to Lecter's escapades, from the chilling (*Red Dragon* [1981/2002]; *The Silence of the Lambs* [1988/1991]) to the Gothic (*Hannibal* [1999/2001]) through to the ridiculous (*Hannibal Rising* [2006/2007]), much of the anticipation for this new series rested upon the willingness of producers Bryan Fuller (*Pushing Daisies* [2007-2009]; *Dead Like Me* [2003-2004]) and David Slade (Dir. *Hard Candy* [2005]; *30 Days of Night* [2007]) to explore Lecter's own psychopathy while simultaneously bringing this character to life beyond the more familiar confines of the asylum. As a character, Lecter brings with him a particular form of expectation for the audience; no other fictional serial killer has made such a generational and cultural impact through his multiple adaptations from the page to the screen (both cinema and television). He must be a suitable and recognisable version of Anthony Hopkins' popular and culturally celebrated incarnation (from *The Silence of the Lambs* onwards) with the menace of Brian Cox's more frightening but less urbane Lecktor (as portrayed in 1986's *Manhunter*). All of this may provoke the question: what need or desire is there for another narrative in the Lecter saga? After all, Hannibal Lecter has been with us for more than thirty years. Thankfully, though, *Hannibal* has more than delivered a promising appetiser which has garnered critical acclaim, and producers have confirmed its second season will air in early 2014.

Hannibal's first season successfully adapts the world of Thomas Harris and his damaged characters with aplomb and celebrates the Gothic in thirteen visually arresting episodes, each of which seems strikingly fresh and original (especially worthy of note considering its source material was published in 1981). The show also remains genuinely uncanny and abject throughout, and key to its success is its sustained sense of menace and tension as it dramatises unsettling scenes of Gothic mutilation, violence, and cannibalism. Special Investigator Will Graham (Hugh Dancy) is brought into the field by Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne) to work on a

case concerning eight missing girls. When Graham is found to be unstable and psychologically damaged because of his unique ability to glean an empathic insight into the killer's motives and reasoning, he is referred to psychiatrist Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen) whose psychological expertise provides Graham with the mental anchor he needs to continue investigating the case under Crawford's direction. As the season develops and the central case unfolds, the show handles familiar characters in a manner which is carefully considered and balanced, and rewards fans with sublime and detailed visual and intertextual references to earlier film versions of Harris's texts directed by Michael Mann, Jonathan Demme, Brett Ratner and Ridley Scott. (Thus far, there seems to be a deliberate dismissal of *Hannibal Rising* in the series plan – both the novel and film version.) To appreciate the series as a whole, re-watching the film adaptations will reveal the level of significant and exhaustive detail to be found throughout *Hannibal*, and helps demonstrate that this show is lovingly made by and for those who know and wish to re-enter Harris' dark world.

Furthermore, specific rewards can be found in knowing and recognising the visual and aural cues (and clues) in each episode which allude to the earlier films. For example, we hear Bach's *Goldberg Variations* as Lecter is introduced in the first episode and see his sketches (in reference to *The Silence of the Lambs*), while later references are made to *Red Dragon*, *Manhunter* and (in particular) Ridley Scott's 2001 *Hannibal*. According to producer Bryan Fuller, this first season is – in theory – designed eventually to lead to the events of the novel *Red Dragon*, with later seasons ambitiously sketched to adapt each of the Lecter novels in turn (while hopefully discarding the disappointing *Hannibal Rising* in favour of larger segments of the novel *Hannibal*). Given the Gothic and visual riches on display in this first season, the prospect that it may lead to further, closer adaptations of the novels is thrilling; in fact, if realised, such ambitions for this series might accommodate the more grotesque aspects of Harris' novels and Lecter's terrible appetites.

If the show does go on to explore this grotesquery even further in later seasons, it remains to be seen if it would find an audience beyond die-hards, as even Season One might be too hard for the uninitiated to take. Some of the crimes featured in the series leave strong imprints, as the show frequently and vividly delights in the Gothic twisting of the human body and mind, gorgeous in its grotesqueness. But there is much to savour in Season One. Hugh Dancy is excellent as the brilliant but

damaged Will Graham, seemingly unhinged and chaotic at times; his tense performance is exhausting to watch, and the visions that haunt him provide a beautiful and terrifying landscape (a "mind palace" of his own perhaps?) onto which all the horrors of serial killing are projected, and deciphered. Mads Mikkelsen's Lecter, the central anti-hero/villain-in-waiting, is clearly channelling Hopkins' Lecter with added nastiness and unrestrained culinary experimentation, but unfortunately lacks his crisp and deliberate diction – this Lecter frequently mumbles, which simply "won't do" as we proceed to later seasons. Laurence Fishburne, Caroline Dhavernas and Lara Jean Chorostecki (as Jack Crawford, Dr. Alana Bloom, and reporter Freddie Lounds respectively) are exceptionally strong in their supporting roles (convincingly modified from their literary counterparts), and offer occasional but necessary relief from the ongoing psychological dance between Graham and Lecter. In part, the show succeeds because of its effectiveness as a police procedural with a Gothic/horror aesthetic – an example of the increasingly graphic and gruesome detective fiction genre – but also because of the level of genuine anticipation that is afforded by adapting these familiar texts for the television screen. Collectively, this is a powerful recipe for future seasons, which are destined to relate stories we know and want to reimagine and re-experience again, particularly in the prolonged experience of viewing a television series. We all know where this story will eventually lead but the precise devil in the details relies on the delicate consistency of these narrative elements for future series. Macabre, gripping and beautiful, this first season of *Hannibal* is simply delectable.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

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Bates Motel: Season One (A&E 2013)

By all accounts, *Bates Motel* (a prequel to Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 feature film *Psycho*) seemed to have all of the odds stacked against it. In essence, creating a backstory to a cult classic, by one of the world's most lauded directors, is an almost impossible ask, especially in light of a negative fan reception upon its announcement. In spite of this, however, *Bates Motel* concluded a ten-episode run of its first season to wide critical acclaim, as well as a generally satisfied viewer base. This televised prequel explores the relationship between a teenage Norman Bates (Freddie

Highmore) and his erratic and deranged mother Norma (Vera Farmiga), in order to illustrate the factors behind Norman's transformation into the killer from the original *Psycho*. After the death of his father, Norman (now portrayed as a sensitive and intellectual youth) is swept away to the iconic and dilapidated motel that featured in the film incarnation of *Psycho*. This forced move is initiated by Norma, and causes friction between her and her son, which is exacerbated by Norman's attempts to negotiate the various external factors and pressures he faces as a modern young man. This makes for a generally intriguing portrait of the Bates family's origins, albeit a portrait set in contemporary times, as opposed to the era of the original film. In particular, the show's impressive casting, with an exceptional and convincing performance from Vera Farmiga, helps create a fascinating vision of an iconic fictional family, and establish the show as one of the best newcomers of the season.

Within the opening episodes, however, a few elements of the show fail to impress. The indicators that this is a contemporary update/reimagining of a concept initially created in 1960 are a little jarring at first – for example, the styling of Norman's peers and overtly rebellious brother (Max Thieriot) as contemporary teenage types, and the inclusion of modern technology. These flourishes, including iPhones and other new technologies, contrast starkly with the dilapidated architecture of the motel, which matches that of the original film. This sense of modernity is initially distracting, but becomes less so over the course of the series. As the show develops, any lingering desire the viewer might have had for more temporal ambiguity in its setting seems to disperse, as s/he is gradually introduced to the surrounding, delightfully twisted community, which is highly reminiscent of the television show *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). The introduction of a miscellany of quirky characterisations also lends to this vibe, creating constant catharsis for protagonists Norma and Norman. This is mainly implemented through a dispute which revolves around ownership rights to the motel, initiated by an attack on Norma by the original owner of the premises (which was since sold to Norma by the bank). The consequences of this attack subsequently entangles Norma in a dispute with local law enforcement, also providing us with insight into the locality, due to Norma's concealed murder of her aggressor and subsequent rumours about this.

In terms of plot, *Bates Motel* features multiple whodunit arcs throughout the series. The motel is used as a hub, while the show branches out into the surrounding

town, in order to depict Norma's conflict with the peculiar residents of the crime-ridden area over her purchase of the property. The viewer's prior knowledge of Hitchcock's film means that s/he knows the notoriously grim resolution to this relationship, and the makers of *Bates Motel* are interested throughout in exploring the events that will eventually bring about this conclusion. In particular, the focus on Norma Bates' blatant possessiveness of her son, linked with her personality disorder, is well-conceived. Farmiga's high-octane performance in this role is especially memorable, and does much to help negate the aforementioned annoyances. Her goading of Norman in the guise of an overprotective mother figure plays out exceptionally well, and suggests that Norma may be a contributor in creating the "psycho" that we see in the original film. It is also implied that Norma's own psychological problems provide a trigger for Norman's emerging psychosis, and that this may, in fact, be a hereditary condition. This is borne out in a therapy session as the show progresses, which provides an interesting context for Norman Bates' origins. His unwavering dependency upon his mother, due to her psychological indoctrination, also plays a large role in revealing him as the emerging "psycho" as the season progresses.

The show's exploration of the relationship between Norman and his mother is clearly its main interest, but the effects of this relationship on Norman's interactions with other persons of his own age are also highlighted – in particular his relationships with young women. Norman's Oedipus complex begins to emerge during his relationship with his classmate Bradley (Nicola Peltz), further reinforcing Norma's detrimental influence upon his psyche. This series of exchanges between the young couple is one of the more insightful aspects of the show, which subtly refers to the original film, triggering suspicions in the audience that this may indeed become the first "shower scene" of the series (teasing us with the possibility that Bradley may become the first victim). This level of ambiguity and tension in *Bates Motel* is where the screenwriting truly shines, leaving space to play with Norman's ever-increasing psychosis, which will inevitably manifest itself by the end of the season. The contrasting sensitive dynamic created around Norman's character is a commendable inclusion, placing him as an anti-hero towards whom we are invited to become sympathetic, despite his increasingly unstable mental condition.

Overall, *Bates Motel* is a welcome addition to the catalogue of new television series that have been released this year. It has also ended its initial ten-episode run on an exceptionally engrossing cliff-hanger, which leaves the viewer wondering how both Norman and his mother will deal with the deterioration of their respective mental conditions. *Bates Motel* has achieved the seemingly impossible task of creating a compelling backstory to a cult classic, which many may feel should not be meddled with, and should indeed be highly commended on this front. The series is most certainly one to watch for the coming season.

Oisin Vink