Fears of Old Age, Cultural Representations of Elders and Narrative Twists of Aging in Four Horror Episodes of the *Twilight Zone*

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Introduction

In his comprehensive essay on horror fiction, *Danse Macabre*, which comprises the analysis of the most relevant novels and films in the history of the genre, American writer Stephen King highlights the importance of Rod Serling's pioneering original television series *The Twilight Zone* (2000, 260). Authors who shifted comfortably from novels to screenwriting contributed many scripts to the series, as is the case with Charles Beaumont, George Clayton Johnson and, particularly, Richard Matheson, whom King has credited as one of the basic inspirations for his career (Nolan 2009, 10). As King further claims, *The Twilight Zone* was rooted in "solid concepts which form a vital link between the old pulp fiction predating the fifties and the new literature of horror," while he cherished that each episode introduced "ordinary people in extraordinary situations, people who had somehow turned sideways and slipped through a crack in reality" (2000: 276), which is one of the main reasons for which King has also been praised as one of the masters of contemporary horror fiction.

The Twilight Zone was an American anthology series which ran on CBS for five seasons, from 1959 to 1964, attracting popular and critical

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acclaim on equal terms. Pertaining to genres ranging from horror and fantasy to science fiction, *The Twilight Zone* presented a series of episodes, which were independent from each other, in terms of plot, characters, setting, and script, while the technical staff, comprising cast, directors, and screenwriters, also differed in each episode. According to William Boddy, though, all the episodes displayed narratological continuities (1984: 107), such as Rod Serling's voice-over, whose omniscient comments introduced and brought each piece to an end, and its narrative structure, which involved a short presentation of the situation that set the plot in motion, the introduction of the bizarre before a pause for commercials, and a surprising twist which implied a change in perspective and provided a final coda which was evocative of a modern moral fable.

An analysis of the episodes in the original five seasons of the series exposes that aging reveals itself as a recurring theme that is discussed from manifold perspectives. In its own plural dimensions, aging arises as a particularly appropriate and malleable theme from a narratological point of view to be approached through the genres of horror, fantasy, and science fiction. In the different seasons of the series, a variety of subjects inextricably related to the discourses of aging are tackled, such as magical potions that provide eternal youth, the blurring edges of life stages, the almighty power that elders may exert over the youth, scientific breakthroughs that extend life beyond its natural limits, intergenerational conflicts, and the fizzy boundaries that separate life from death (Miquel-Baldellou 2016: 113). In many of these narratives that explicitly address aging, the portrayal of old characters often evokes cultural images traditionally associated with the aged, which Herbert Covey (1991) identifies as patriarchs endowed with some spiritual dimension that transcends death, personifications of the sage or the witch derived from popular folklore, misers exerting a tight economic control as legacy of traditional family structures, sentimentalized elders in their grandparental roles, and aged individuals who defy the established cultural dictates of aging and are portrayed as ludicrous and grotesque.

Anxieties and fears related to aging and the aged are discussed in different episodes of *The Twilight Zone* that are categorized within the hor-

ror genre. Even if mostly set in American middle-class suburbs at the end of the fifties and early sixties, the horror narratives of *The Twilight Zone* comply with most of the tenets pertaining to the Gothic tradition that critics like David Stevens point out, such as the fascination with the past, the juxtaposition of reality and the supernatural, the exploration of the unconscious, the exploitation of the sinister and the macabre, the alienation of domestic scenarios, and the structural disposition of plots within plots which favors subjectivity and a shift of perspective (2010: 46). The ambiguous nature that characterizes horror, together with the recurrent narratological structure of reversing the initial situation that typifies each of the narratives, paves the way for the ambivalent portrayal of old age that is fostered in *The Twilight Zone*. According to Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin van Riper, contemporary filmic narratives that deal with aging mostly reflect "ambivalent attitudes toward growing old" (2019, 1), as elders are characterized in the roles of either victims or villains, and the fears of aging that are explored range from the dread of aging badly through dependence and illness to the fearful fantasies of abject bodies returning back to life to haunt their younger counterparts. Many decades prior to the release of contemporary horror films that explore the anxieties of aging and present an ambiguous portrait of old age, *The Twilight Zone* produced a series of horror narratives which explicitly addressed old age and called into question culturally assumed notions about aging.

An analysis of four horror narratives in *The Twilight Zone* which explore different fears related to the discourses of aging will serve the purpose of identifying how cultural perceptions of old age are constructed and disrupted, thus providing an eminently ambiguous portrayal of aging, and evoking and subverting the ways the aged and the youth are represented in popular culture. The first narrative that will be addressed in this essay is "Night Call" for which Richard Matheson wrote its screen narrative based on his own short story featuring Elva Keene, an aged woman who starts receiving some mysterious phone calls in the middle of the night. In "Spur of the Moment," with a script also written by Matheson, a young girl, Anne Henderson, flees in terror as she is chased by a terrifying aging woman dressed in black. "Nothing in the Dark," written

by George Clayton Johnson, portrays the last days of Wanda Dunn, an aged woman who encloses herself at home out of fear with the hope of escaping death in old age. Finally, with a script written by Charles Beaumont and William Idelson, "Long Distance Call" tells the story of five-year-old boy Billy Bayles who speaks to his late grandmother on the toy phone she gave him as a present for his birthday. By means of narratological elements pertaining to the horror genre, but also through the underlying structure of the series that plays with the audience's expectations and resorts to unexpected final twists of the plot, these four narratives evoke, as well as subvert, popular beliefs of aging and the contrasting representation of youth and old age. This essay aims at analysing the ways in which these four horror narratives evoke cultural assumptions which associate old age with determinate values only to disrupt them and provide an ambivalent and twilight portrayal which fosters critical thinking and the revision of socially-accepted representations of elders and old age.

Beware of the Victimized Loner: Fears of Aging Badly in "Night Call"

"Night Call" portrays the apparently uneventful life of Miss Elva Keene, an older woman who lives alone in a rural community in Maine, when, all of a sudden, she starts receiving disturbing phone calls at night. Based on Richard Matheson's short-story "Long Distance Call," which was originally published with the title "Sorry, Right Number," and adapted to the screen also with a script written by Matheson, "Night Call" consists of tale of horror which addresses the fears of aging, and in particular, as Cynthia Miller and A. Bowdoin van Riper would say, the "fears of aging badly" as a result of envisioning old age as a degenerative process and of presenting the elderly as struggling with marginalization and victimization (2019: 1). At the beginning of both the original story and its screen adaptation, Elva's aging traits are constantly highlighted, thus contributing to constructing a portrayal of old age mostly characterized by dependence and physical decline.

In Matheson's short story, attention is drawn to Elva's difficulty in carrying out her daily routines which often bring her close to the point of fatigue and exhaustion,

stating that, "her thin hand faltered in the darkness," "her infirm back ached from effort of sitting," and "she forced out a weary breath" (2008: 253), while "she couldn't stretch far enough and crippled legs prevented her from rising" (2008: 255). An early passage in the narrative also informs about the monotony of her existence, as it is claimed that "life for Miss Keene was the sorry pattern of lying flat or being propped on pillows, reading books which Nurse Phillips brought from the town library, getting nourishment, rest, medication, listening to her tiny radio-and waiting, *waiting* for something different to happen" (254). In its screen adaptation, the aging traits of the character are also emphasized through close-up shots of actress Gladys Cooper, which highlight her white hair and the lines on her face. Her clothes also contribute significantly to stressing old age, as Elva often wraps her shoulders with a cardigan or a woolen scarf. Props like a wheelchair, pill bottles, and a glass of milk on her bedside table, together with the ever presence of Nurse Margaret Phillips, are constant reminders of Elva's permanent convalescence and expose that she is in need of constant care. Elva's portrayal as an older woman complies with Sally Chivers's premises about commonly held assumptions that associate the aged body with disability (2013: 8), which contribute to envisioning old age as mostly linked with invalidism, dependence, inactivity, and loneliness. These dramaturgical props, which are often linked with old age in popular culture, also reveal the role that cultural discourses play to categorise individuals as aged (Gullette 2004: 12), hence exposing old age as an eminently cultural construct.

Nonetheless, Elva's tedious existence is suddenly brought to a halt when she begins to receive some mysterious phone calls in the middle of the night. The phone calls pave the way for the fantastic to make its appearance in the safe haven of Elva's domesticity. As the narrative unfolds, many elements indicative of classic gothic trappings are displayed cinematically, while, in narratological terms, the narrative remains entirely focalized on Elva's as a character. The cinematic style of the episode is allusive of its director, Jacques Tourneur, the French film director, who

was particularly influenced by German expressionism and the films of directors such as F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, and Robert Wiene, and whose cinematic techniques gave precedence to subjective perspectives and the distortion of reality for the sake of emotional effect. By means of extreme close-up shots of Elva, the narrative remains focalized on her perception of reality, while an opening chiaroscuro scene, with looming shadows superimposing on Elva, highlights an impending sense of danger which signals Elva as its besieged victim, and contributes to increasing the audience's feelings of fear and anxiety.

Among the distinctive elements of the Gothic tradition that this narrative displays, the initial sequence portrays an isolated house and resorts to darkness, stormy weather, and particularly, the sound of thunder as the response to Elva's answering the phone in the middle of the night. The mysterious origins of these calls underpin Tzvetan Todorov's disjunctive between "the marvelous" and "the uncanny" as different ways to account for the fantastic (1975: 41–42). The sound of thunder as a response to Elva's queries seems to indicate a sign from the transcendence, thus hinting at "the marvelous," rather than "the uncanny," as the basis of this puzzle. Nevertheless, the explanation for these enigmatic calls may still simply lie in the phone's bad connection in such stormy weather, which would make room for the "uncanny," on account of which apparently supernatural phenomena turn out to have a rational explanation. This second hypothesis seems more feasible when the following morning Elva calls the phone company to inquire about these mysterious calls and the young operator, Miss Finch, informs her that the phone line has probably been damaged during the storm.

The two young women that Elva interacts with on a daily basis, Miss Finch and Nurse Phillips, often bring to the fore prevalent social prejudices against the elderly. In Matheson's story, it is stated that "Miss Finch thought she [Elva] was a nervous old woman falling prey to imagination" (2008: 259), and when Elva tells her nurse that she thinks the person responsible for those mysterious calls is a man, Nurse Phillips retorts, "you don't have to talk to him. Just hang up. Is that so hard to do?" (2008: 261). Nurse Phillips's words subtly unveil social prescriptions that disapprove of sexuality in old age. As Covey argues, the notion of romantic love has

often been regarded as age inappropriate for older people (1991: 112), particularly for women, given the conventional assumption that sexual desire ends with menopause. Taking Elva's statements about a whispering male voice calling her in the middle of the night as the result of an aged woman's romantic flights of fancy, both Nurse Phillips and Miss Finch dismiss Elva's account of the facts as eccentric and even ridiculous in a portrait not entirely unlike that of Miss Havisham. Like Dickens's ghostly character in *Great Expectations*, Miss Elva Keene often appears as dressed in white, she hardly ever leaves home and, given the constant appellation to her marital status at her age, she is considered a "spinster" concealing a mysterious and tragic love story which took place in her youth.

This succession of calls from a mysterious male voice has an ambivalent effect on Elva and her attitude toward them. At first, she feels both pestered and terrified upon hearing the frightening moans and almost inarticulate speech from a stranger's male voice. Nonetheless, in a subtle, and even ironic, way, these calls seem to give her a purpose and she even grows restless upon expecting them in the evening, as if waiting for somebody she could eventually talk to and finally bring her loneliness to an end. This transformation shows in Elva's appearance, which gradually undergoes a symbolic process of rejuvenation that becomes perceptible through her choice of clothes and hairstyle. This self-induced change on Elva's looks calls to mind Anne Basting's premise about the "performative nature of aging" (1998: 4), Margaret Gullette's precepts about acting younger or older (2004: 168) regardless of one's chronological age, and Kathleen Woodward's notion about aging being performed in correlation with gender (2006: 165). However, according to Barbara Walker, displays of sexual allure on behalf of postmenopausal women have been considered "a moral evil" (1985: 90) and aging women who evince sexual interest have often been judged as grotesque and even socially threatening. As a result of these precepts, a subsequent moral retribution finds its way when Elva's positive prospects take a turn for the worse. Miss Finch, the telephone operator, calls Elva to tell her that there is no way any man could have called her on the previous nights because the repairmen have traced the wire which fell down during the storm and caused the phone

line massive damage, ultimately finding out that the wire is lying on the outskirts of town and, in fact, in one of the graves of the cemetery.

After this shocking revelation, the plot comes to an end in a differing way in Matheson's original story and its screen adaptation. In the short story, after Elva is informed that the calls have been traced as coming from the graveyard, she receives a highly disturbing final call in which the speaker tells her, "Hello, Miss Elva. I'll be right over" (265). This unsettling statement complies with what King terms as 'terror' as opposed to 'horror,' since it is rather "what the mind imagines [rather than what the eye sees] what makes a story a quintessential tale of terror" worthy of its name (2000: 36). At a literal level, as an example of 'horror,' the reader may picture a walking corpse creeping on its way to Elva's home, which would be somehow evocative of the end in W.W. Jacobs's story "The Paw," but, at a more metaphorical level, as indicative of 'terror,' the conclusion in the original story rather points at Death finally knocking on Elva's door, which brings to the fore the fear of death in old age, in the still of the night, when Elva is alone and helpless in her bed.

In contrast, the ending of Matheson's screen adaptation rather emphasizes notions of sin, guilt, and retribution which comply with the narratological features of *The Twilight Zone* and endow this horror story with some of the components of a moral fable. As Matheson explains in relation to the recurrent narratological structure of the series, "structurally, we all did the same thing, which was to start out with a little teaser that gets the viewer interested, and then have a little suspense item at the end of the first act, and then resolving it through the script, through the story, and then finishing it with a surprise ending, or at the very least, some kind of ironic observation regarding the story" (Stanyard 2007: 162). The surprising turn that the plot takes in Matheson's screen adaptation seems grounded in a passage from the original story in which it is unveiled that, while lying in bed and unable to sleep, Elva feels compelled to "turn the faucet in her brain and keep unwanted thoughts from dripping" (2008: 254), which subtly underscores Elva's latent sense of guilt for some unknown reason. In the screen adaptation, Nurse Phillips finally takes Elva to the cemetery, where the older woman realises that the damaged telephone wire is lying within the grave of

her late fiancé, Brian, who died in a car accident for which she was to blame. Elva tells Nurse Phillips that she was very dominating and Brian always did what she said, so she insisted on driving, causing an accident which killed Brian and rendered her unable to walk for life. According to Carl Plantinga, this conclusion could be categorized as a surprising turn whereby "the ending is surprising for the spectator, but not so for the character" (45), since, by means of a twist of the plot, the viewer's initial thoughts on Elva shift significantly, as she moves from being initially victimized to being eventually vilified. Upon knowing that the mysterious caller is her late fiancé, Elva feels relieved that she will finally have someone to talk to. Nonetheless, as a result of cosmic irony, when he calls her that night, he refuses to talk to her on the grounds that, on the previous call, she told him to leave her alone, and so he retorts this is what he will do since he always does what she says. "Night Call" thus turns into what Noël Carroll considers a "tale of dread" (1990: 42), insofar as it involves some sort of cosmic moral justice and it is hinted that Elva is eventually punished for her past sins. This ironic, but tragic, turn of prospects, paves the way for an open ending, which can be interpreted as either Brian's ghost finally taking revenge on his fiancée, or simply Elva's ghost of conscience punishing herself as a result of unsurmountable guilt in her old age.

From a narratological perspective, this episode displays a circular structure which enacts the transformation of Elva's portrayal as an aged woman. The initial close-up shot of Elva's wheelchair categorizes her as a victim, and depicts Elva as helpless and dependent. Conversely, at its close, given the change of prospects, Elva's wheelchair is a reminder of the accident for which she is held responsible for her fiancé's death and her own disabled condition. Since Elva is gradually portrayed from victim to villain, her depiction as an older woman offers an ambivalent portrayal of old age, as she is subjected to a process of victimization first only to be disclosed that she is to blame and is, in fact, punished eventually as a result of poetic justice. The ending of Matheson's screen adaptation is somehow evocative of Robert Aldrich's film *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* which was released only two years before "Night Call" was broadcast on television. Baby Jane is first portrayed as a sadistic and alcoholic

older woman, apparently guilty of causing the accident which incapacitated her sister Blanche. Nonetheless, it is later on revealed that, in spite of her innocent appearance, Blanche is accountable for her own disabled condition, as so is Elva in Matheson's script. In comparison with Matheson's original short story, whereby the reader imagines a walking corpse creeping off to Elva's place or, metaphorically, the figure of Death finally knocking on Elva's door, his screen adaptation rather suggests that there may be something more terrifying than death for Elva, which is loneliness in old age and, particularly, the burden of haunting memories as a result of an unyielding sense of guilt.

Afraid of the Aging Rider: the Dread of Recognizing Oneself as Old in "Spur of the Moment"

With a script also written by Matheson and under the direction of Elliot Silverstein, "Spur of the Moment" was originally broadcast only a couple of weeks after "Night Call." From its onset, this film acquires the aura of an intriguing fairy tale. In the first scene, a young woman, Anne Henderson, who is to be married to a wealthy man, Robert, against her will, because she is actually in love with David, whom her parents strongly disapprove of, leaves from an elegant country house to ride her horse when, all of a sudden, she begins to be chased violently by a mysterious aging woman, who is also on horseback, but is all dressed in black. Given the resemblance of this story with an eerie fairy tale, the image of the aging woman in black is highly evocative of the folktale character of the witch. According to Covey, older women have ancestrally been associated with witchcraft, as the iconic representation of the witch in popular folklore corresponds with that of "an old woman, dressed in black, and riding a broomstick" (71), thus resembling the portrayal of this aging woman in black that haunts Anne.

This vociferous and wild older woman is described in Rod Serling's voice-over teaser at the beginning of the episode as "a strange, nightmarish figure of a woman in black, who has appeared as if from nowhere and now, at driving gallop, chases the terrified girl across the countryside, as

if she means to ride her down and kill her." As an aging woman yelling at her victim, she becomes a source of the abject, which Julia Kristeva defines as the feeling that one experiences upon being confronted by a breakdown in the distinction between what is self and what is other. To use Kristeva's terms, "the abject appears in order to uphold 'I' within the Other," insofar as "it takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away" (1982: 15). Being both on horseback and enacting the same scene recurrently, it is suggested that the alienating figure of the aging woman in black may actually be closer to young Anne that she may even dare to think.

As the story unfolds and the terrified young girl goes back home to tell her parents and fiancé about the frightening aging woman who has been chasing her, in a mirrored scene, the aging woman also goes back home, to the same country house, where she unveils to her remarkably aged mother the following revelation:

> You know who I saw today? I saw a ghost, Mother. My own. Intriguing, isn't it? To be haunted by one's own self. Positively intriguing. I'm talking about ghosts, Mother. Phantoms, visitations, reminders from the past and the future. I went out riding today, out where I usually go, beyond the meadow. I was on the ridge, and I saw this young girl ride toward me. Me, Mother, as I looked at eighteen.

It is thus disclosed that the aging woman in black who chases young Anne at the beginning of the episode is, in fact, her older self. As she puts forward this revelation, she is standing as an older woman in front of a portrait of herself which was painted when she was young, so that her younger and older selves are visually juxtaposed in order to substantiate her explanation of the facts. This overlapping, and also disentanglement, of youth and old age bring about the shift in the focalization of the narrative voice that is to follow, which draws attention to the alternation of identities between these two symbolic doubles, thus questioning which of them stands for the source of the abject. For the young woman who looks terrified when the episode starts, the older woman becomes the Other, whereas for the older woman whose identity is revealed half

through the narrative, it is her younger self whom she identifies as the source of her nightmarish existence and who urges her to chase her and warn her not to marry the wrong man.

The plot of this episode is narratologically structured along the combination of two different timeframes impinging on one another and, in this respect, Stewart Stanyard categorizes this narrative among those addressing the theme of time travel in the series (2007: 50). The implicit encroachment of the past into the present and the present back to the past explores the cyclical quality of life stages, thus suggesting that youth and old age are inherently related to one another instead of far removed from each other by means of the establishment of time boundaries. This interpretation is reinforced through dramaturgical props which either conceal or emphasize old age, thus underscoring the constructed quality of aging and, by extension, of the passage of time. The same actress, Diana Hyland, plays both roles as younger and older Anne, which lays bare how aging is visually counterfeited on the screen through resorting to what Margaret Gullette has referred to as "age effects" (2004: 171) both in terms of make-up and acting techniques. Along Hyland's performance of Anne's older self in her decadent mansion, close-up shots of her face stress her lines and wrinkles, incipient white hair, and the dark circles under her eyes. Her gestures denote lack of energy and passivity, which match her haggard look and distinctive nonchalance. Conversely, though, Anne's older self is also characterized as enraged and vigorous in the presence of her younger self, who, in contrast, feels overwhelmed and weakened by the haunting aging woman who rides in her pursuit.

As the narrative focalizes on Anne's older self, initial suspicions about the aging woman being a witch are left behind in favor of perceiving this older woman as a resolute fairy who wishes to warn her younger and more ingenuous self. Ironically, though, Anne's younger self is reluctant to listen to the aging woman's good advice given her prejudice and fear of the older woman, which leads her to categorize her as a devilish creature whose sole purpose must be that of killing her. Insofar as, at the beginning of the episode, Anne is about to marry Robert to please her family, it is assumed that Anne's haunting older self is visiting her younger self in order to warn her not to marry for money, but for love. Nonethe-

less, it is actually the other way round, since Anne's older self intends to prevent her younger self from making a last-minute mistake, as it is revealed that, on the spur of the moment, Anne finally decided to leave her wealthy fiancé Robert and marry David instead, whom she perceived to be her true love at the time.

As a coda to this gloomy and moralizing fairy tale, it is suggested that what is really frightening is not the older woman and her apparent terrifying demeanor, but rather the younger self's preconceptions about her, especially taking into consideration that, as it is unveiled through a display of dramatic irony, this older woman is, in fact, Anne herself. Her younger self's misjudgment is thus evocative of Simone de Beauvoir's claim about our inability to recognize ourselves as old, since, as Kathleen Woodward claims, Beauvoir notices that "we are not old; it is the other, the stranger within us who is old," ultimately arguing that old age belongs to the category of "the unrealizables" (Woodward 1983: 55). As Woodward further notices, "the recognition of our own old age comes to us from the Other" so that "we ultimately are forced to acknowledge the point of view of the Other that has, as it were, installed itself in our body" (1983: 56). Hence, the source of the abject truly lies in Anne's inability to identify herself as old, her alienated perception of herself, and her dread of recognizing herself as aged from the other's perspective.

The narratological disposition of Matheson's script plays with the audience's expectations and the cultural values associated with youth and old age only to subvert them and challenge them subsequently. As happens with "Night Call," "Spur of the Moment" presents a circular structure that refers back to its initial scene and introduces a significant change in perspective. When the story comes to a close, the narrative is not focalized on Anne's younger self, but on her older self, which is no longer perceived as alienating. Upon having met Anne's older self, it is rather her younger self which the spectator holds in contempt as a result of her poor judgement, while her older self finally turns out to be an agent of good will coming to Anne's rescue in spite of her apparently frightening looks.

The initial portrayal of old age in this episode is rooted in folklore representations of aging women as witches, who were ostracized as a re-

sult of their presumed latent power and became ancestral embodiments of social disquiet. The depiction of this aging woman as a source of the abject underpins social prejudices of aged women envisioned as keepers of wisdom and ancestral knowledge. This narrative also explores the fears of aging related to feelings of regret for the mistakes made in youth which can no longer be redeemed and whose effects still prevail in old age. Above all, though, "Spur of the Moment" addresses the psychological implications of not recognizing oneself as old, but rather identifying the aging double as the haunting incarnation of our deepest fears and anxieties.

Let the Young One In: Exploring the Horror of Death in "Nothing in the Dark"

The representation of old age offered in "Nothing in the Dark" is initially rooted in conventional representations of the aged as associated with isolation, poverty, physical fragility, mental instability, and nostalgia for the past. In particular, in his thematic classification of *The Twilight Zone*, Stanyard refers to "Nothing in the Dark" as one of the episodes exploring the experience of dying (2007: 35), insofar as it tackles the will to hold on stubbornly to life in old age as a result of an extreme fear of death. With a script written by George Clayton Johnson, the symbolic and transcendent content of "Nothing in the Dark" complies with its author's beliefs of what fantasy should involve, since "it must be about the human condition" (Zicree 1992: 166). As a moral parable, this episode arises as an allegory which metaphorically exemplifies the physical and spiritual movement from darkness into the light, as the female protagonist gains insight into the experience of dying and, accordingly, her perception of the ways to approach the last stage of existence and even death undergoes an important change.

In "Nothing in the Dark," Wanda Dunn, played by Gladys Copper, locks herself up in her basement apartment during the remaining years of her old age with the determination of escaping Death. To that purpose, she lives in utter isolation and refuses to open the door to any un-

expected guest in case Death may finally make its entry into her permanently sheltered, but also, constraining existence. In an initial scene, Wanda is first shown lying in her disheveled bed, protected with chairs carefully propped against its sides in order to avoid any fall that may bring her closer to the much dreaded and constantly projected end of her life. Her obsessive concern to protect herself from the world outside is exposed by means of frames that emphasize her perpetual enclosure, such as when her face shows behind the bars of her shielding, but imposing, headboard. Wanda thus seems unaware that, owing to her wish to overcome any predictable danger that may threaten her already wavering existence, she may actually be condemning herself to a virtual life-in-death. An initial close-up of Wanda's face brings attention to her white hair and her wrinkled features, as she lies helplessly in her bed. Despite being apparently asleep, her face still betrays an acute sense of strain and distress as a result of her fear of suffering and impending danger. Her hypochondria and self-acknowledged vulnerability renders her unable to enjoy an apparently peaceful and quiet old age, since she lives in a permanent state of alertness, trusting no intruders, and rejecting any interaction with those outside her shabby home.

The tiny derelict apartment in which she barricades herself behind a permanently locked door is presented as an extension of her fragile body, insofar as an initial tracking shot displays her neglected abode, with unkempt floors, dilapidated furniture, and half-boarded windows which expose Wanda to cold and snow as if she were virtually living in the open air. Wanda's frail body remains at the mercy of external perils that may finally put an end to her life in the same way as her derelict apartment is exposed to the inclemency of the bad weather. A contractor hired to demolish her home feels stunned upon discovering that someone is still living under such conditions and even deems her half-mad, as the place has been condemned and all the surrounding buildings have already been destroyed. Facing Wanda's reluctance to abandon her dwelling in spite of its imminent destruction, the contractor seems to establish further connections between Wanda's tampered abode and her fragile body, as he states that "when a building is old, it's dangerous. It's gotta come down to make room for a new one. That's life, lady. Old make room for the new

[…] A big tree falls and new ones grow right out of the same ground. Old animals die and young ones take their places. Even people step aside when it's time." Nevertheless, paying no heed to the contractor's warnings, Wanda intends to stay in her condemned basement room even if it is bound to be demolished, just as she holds on to her flimsy existence although she perceives that her final curtain will also come down soon.

In contrast, Wanda is gradually depicted as an inherently warmhearted and caring aging woman who renounces her sense of prudence if it is for the sake of helping others. As a close-up of her horrified face denotes, Wanda awakes in utter terror upon hearing some gunshots and the gasping voice of a young man asking her to come to his aid and disturb her isolation. Given her apprehensive nature, she double-checks that her door is properly locked before she dares to lay eyes upon Harold Beldon, a helpless attractive young officer in black, played by Robert Redford, who is lying wounded outside her apartment. His imploring cries for help pose an ethical issue when he declares that, unless she helps him, he will surely die. His relentless appeals not only force Wanda to conquer her fears, but also to face an existentialist dilemma, as she is well aware that the act of helping the man to save his life may be at the risk of exposing herself to death. In spite of her initial aversion, Wanda finally agrees to open the door of her apartment and nurse the wounded officer. Amazed that she is still alive after establishing contact with the stranger, Wanda discloses the reason for leading such a secluded existence and living in constant fear. To the young man's puzzlement, who finds the aging woman unreasonable and rather eccentric, Wanda admits that she feels in constant awe of meeting Mr. Death again and recounts the first time that she encountered him, which marked the advent of her old age:

> I was on a bus. There was an old woman sitting in front of me, knitting. Socks, I think. There was something about her face. I felt I knew her. Then this young man got on. There were empty seats, but he sat down beside her. He didn't say anything but… his being there upset her. He seemed like a nice young man. When she dropped her yarn, he picked it up. Right in front of me. He held it up to her. I saw their

> fingers touch. He got out at the next stop. When the bus reached the end of the line… she was dead.

Ever since this epiphanic event, Wanda has protected herself from the lingering presence of Death, which is personified surprisingly by a young man who keeps on shifting his appearance and nobody, except herself, can see. Wanda explicitly acknowledges that aged people are able to spot Mr. Death, whereas young individuals may still perceive his presence, but not so clearly. She thus recognizes him owing to the fact that, to use her own words, she is "getting older" and feels her time is "coming." Upon recounting this event, ironically, Wanda subtly acknowledges her close attachment to "the old woman" on the bus, but she fails to establish a corresponding connection between the "nice young man" whom she identified as an embodiment of Death and the wounded officer that she has recently allowed into her house.

Nostalgically, looking back to her youth, Wanda recollects that she used to love being outdoors and basking in the sunlight, as opposed to her current self-imposed enclosure in old age, which urges her to lead a nearly vampiric existence, subsisting in the dark and detaching herself from the reality outside her apartment. Her metaphorical characterization as a vampire is also made effective by means of a close-up shot of her faltering hand reaching out to the timid, but warm, rays of sun shining across her half-boarded window, as if she were afraid of the light. Nonetheless, Wanda is not the only one who shares some of the archetypal features of the vampire, among which Anna Chromik highlights nocturnal life-style, polymorphism, a black attire, and a lack of shadow (2016: 709), which also characterize Wanda's male guest. The officer has been sharing Wanda's isolation and turn for living in the dark owing to his fragile condition during convalescence. It is a result of Wanda's consent, as she finally agrees to let him in her apartment, that he enters her abode, as vampires usually do to seduce their victims. Moreover, when the contractor assumes that Wanda is an eccentric old lady suffering from some sort of mental disorder because she appears to be talking to herself, she finally grasps that no one else can see the male officer except herself, which leads her to gain insight into the young man's preter-

natural condition. To confirm Wanda's suspicions, Beldon urges her to look at his non-existing reflection in the mirror, which matches the vampire's distinguishing lack of shadow. Moreover, he also manages to shift his appearance in resemblance with the polymorphic nature of the vampire. Beldon's characterization not only adds to his resemblance with the Gothic archetype of the vampire, but also reveals that he is the presence that Wanda has been trying to avoid, since, despite his innocent-looking appearance, like the nice young man on the bus, Beldon truly stands for the personification of Death.

Given the fact that only Wanda is aware of Beldon's presence, that the mirror does not reflect back his image, and that they swap places as bedridden convalescents, Wanda and Beldon turn them into doubles of one another. Bearing in mind that Otto Rank describes the double as either "the messenger of death" or "a wish-defense against a dreaded eternal destruction" (1971: 86), this ambivalent role paves the way for interpreting the character of Beldon as either the preternatural incarnation of Death which is coming for Wanda's life in her old age or, rather, as the symbolic materialization of Wanda's fears of death which her unstable mind projects and reifies in order to cope with them. In spite of her initial reluctance, Wanda finally agrees to take Beldon's hand and a close-up of their clasped hands calls to mind Wanda's memories about "the old woman" and "the nice young man" approaching each other on the bus. Moreover, when Beldon addresses Wanda as "mother" while they are holding hands, the contractor's words about the old making room for the new are evoked once again, as the process comes full circle and past and present appear to blend in.

Despite Wanda's expected fears of suffering upon the advent of death, Beldon appeases her confirming that "what you feared would come like an explosion is like a whisper – what you thought was the end is the beginning," as he asks her to look at herself lying dead in her bed, where the male officer had been lying up to then, once she has abandoned the world of the living. Beldon and Wanda exit her apartment and move outside, as Wanda realizes that, as opposed to the gloomy picture of Death that she had entertained for long, Death truly grants her the freedom that she was deprived of in her life as a result of constant

fear. According to Plantinga, "Nothing in the Dark" offers a surprise ending of elevation which contributes to improving the understanding of humanity through positive prospects (2009: 47). Ironically, it is thus hinted that, during the last stages of her life, Wanda endures a vampiric existence which only ceases when the fearful act of dying takes place.

As Zicree claims, "Nothing in the Dark" provides "a thoughtful and moving statement on old age and the fear of death" (1992: 223), which subverts many conventional views about the end of life and approaches it as a natural process that should be embraced rather than rejected. When Wanda finally agrees to welcome the young man in her apartment, whereby she symbolically accepts to give in to Mr. Death, her life takes a turn for the better, and all her anxieties vanish once she envisions death as a sort of liberation from her cloistered existence.

Conventional depictions which characterize Death as a source of dread and terror are left behind in favor of portraying the end of life in an eminently positive light. In contrast with customary characterizations of Death as a gloomy and emaciated woman, as a temptress or female vampire, Beldon is rather depicted as a young man, whom James Taylor even describes as "pleasant, mild-mannered, and handsome" (2009: 172), hence contributing to forging the image of Death as an apparently innocent and approachable figure and, as Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie claim (2016, 187), anticipating contemporary filmic depictions of Death embodied by attractive, albeit deceitful, young men. As Rod Serling's voice-over finally concludes at the end of the episode, Wanda discovers that "there was nothing in the dark that wasn't there when the lights were on," hence subverting the customary interpretation of Death as a horrifying figure that comes to haunt mortals and condemn them to an afterlife existence in complete darkness.

Away with Grandma: In Awe of the Beloved Departed in "Long Distance Call"

"Long Distance Call" also tackles death in old age, albeit it is portrayed in a more disturbing way in comparison with the optimistic prospects

offered in "Nothing in the Dark." Its script was written by William Idelson and Charles Beaumont, the latter being considered second only to Serling in the number of *Twilight Zone* scripts produced and his narratives were characterized by "a strong morbidity and almost clinical fascination with the horrific" (Zicree 1992: 74). This episode portrays the last days of Grandma Bayles, played by Lili Darvas, who lives with her son, Chris, her daughter-in-law, Sylvia, and her grandson, Billy, to whom Grandma feels particularly attached, as is shown when Billy turns five and the family gather together to celebrate the birthday of the youngest member in the family. Although Grandma Bayles is at first depicted as noticeably frail and weak, she also represses some whimsical and even possessive traits which betray a strong personality, even though these turns are mostly attributed to the effects of illness or medication. "Long Distance Call" calls into question the widespread cultural image of the granny as an inherently benevolent and tender-hearted relative, insofar as, following her death, her spirit appears to be willing to hold on to life and exert a malignant influence on the most beloved, but also most vulnerable, member of the family, her grandson Billy. Grandma's ghostly presence extends after death, when she talks to her grandson by means of the toy phone she gave him as a present for his birthday, thus evincing her reluctance to sever the intimate bond that ties them together. Nevertheless, as James Taylor argues, the lengthy conversations that take place between Grandma and Billy on his toy phone, even after she has departed, may also address the child's process of coping with grief and coming to terms with death at such a young age and, to that end, he appears to concoct the strategy of talking to her late granny from 'the other side' (2009: 175). Grandma's lingering spirit may thus respond to Billy's own willingness not to let go off her out of love, owing to his inability to understand the actual meaning of death as a child.

Grandma's present, a toy phone, turns into a magic token, which leads Stanyard to categorize this episode as among those which resort to enchanted objects (2007: 53) whereby 'the marvelous' is granted entry and contributes to subverting the audience's expectations and distorting culturally assumed notions about life and death. In this case, the

toy phone gradually turns into a case of demonic possession through which Grandma exerts her malignant influence on Billy so that he can join her in death and hold complete dominion over his young grandson. This episode thus addresses illness and death in old age, the stifling dominion that the old may hold over the young, and the reluctance of elders to give in to death. In particular, the character of Grandma Bayles fits within the subgenre that Miller and Bowdoin van Riper denominate as 'hag horror,' in which deranged older women are capable of exerting psychological and physical abuse on those around them (2019: 4). In addition, though, since this narrative also caters for an ambivalent interpretation, it also addresses the process of mourning and coming to terms with grief upon facing the death of aged relatives.

As Chivers contends, the aging body is generally associated with illness and disability, insofar as "old age is believed to indicate (at the very least) ill health, and ill health often visually appears in the form of the disabled body" (2011: 8). In the initial sequence of this episode, Grandma Bayles needs help to go down the stairs in order to join the family on Billy's birthday, thus evincing that she can hardly walk, she is dependent, and she is often short of breath, which is further emphasized when her son reminds her doctor's orders not to exert herself and that, as soon as possible, she should go back to her room to have some rest. Grandma Bayles is initially characterized as a loving, wrinkled, and soft-spoken granny, with her gray-hair tied in a low bun and wearing a black cardigan topped with an antique cameo which bespeaks of former times. Nonetheless, her fragile appearance contrasts with some outbursts of character that unveil a strong-minded and even cranky personality. When her son Chris reminds her that she should return to her room soon, she retorts that, "I always follow the rules of the house except when I don't agree with them" and, when she is prevented from cutting the cake not to exhaust herself, she objects, proclaiming that "you think I'm too old to cut the cake – when I'm that old you take the shovel and dig the hole." Despite her declining health, Grandma Bayles thus displays a strong will, as she would not miss her grandson's birthday for the world owing to the special relationship that unites them and from which Billy's parents often feel excluded.

The solid complicity between Grandma and grandson turns them into playmates and evokes the cultural trope of old age construed as second childhood, which envisions the aged as childlike and reverting back into children, thus exposing their dependency, but also blurring the age gap conventionally established between these two life stages, which emphasizes the cyclical, instead of linear, quality of aging. According to Jenny Hockey and Allison James, the traditional link of old age with childhood involves that the hegemony of adulthood remains unchallenged (1995: 138), as children and the aged are often subjugated in contrast with parents in the social stratum. Nonetheless, in "Long Distance Call," this cultural assumption is reversed, as the close-knit bond that ties Grandma Bayles and Billy together condemns his parents to ostracism.

Grandma's portrayal comprises traits pertaining to different Gothic archetypes which accentuate her ambivalence as a character initially depicted as a weak and warm-hearted granny. Before Billy blows out the candles on his birthday cake, at Grandma's request, he makes a wish and discloses it only to her, as she argues, in front of his parents, that "that's a secret between him and me." Grandma also urges Billy to open her present first when his parents are about to offer theirs and, upon displaying a toy telephone as her gift, she remarks it is "a telephone for us so that you can always talk to your grandma even when she is not here." Grandma's words about wishes and gifts conjure up the image of an aging fairy for Billy, even though her blunt possessive ways with her grandson in front of his parents also call to mind the fairy-tale character of the witch. In spite of her frail condition, before returning upstairs to the quietness of her room, Grandma gathers enough strength to express her fondness for her grandson, stating that "he gave me life again – to an old woman good for nothing, no more but to complain, he held out his hands to me and… made me alive." The metaphorical process of rejuvenation to which she refers is reminiscent of that of a vampire, who nourishes on the youth to prolong its existence in spite of its intrinsically old age.

The toy phone that Grandma gives Billy for his birthday acquires symbolic connotations as the link that ties both caller and recipient reinforces the close relationship established between Grandma and

grandson, which she intends to extend even after her death. The toy phone turns into a devilish gift whereby Grandma will continue exerting control over Billy, as he begins to act as if he were possessed by a demonic spirit that urges him to hurt himself. Grandma's possessive and jealous nature is revealed on her deathbed, as she is no longer able to recognize her own son, Chris, stating that "my son was taken away by a woman," that is, Sylvia, Billy's mother, and pointing out that "this is my son, now, Billy." Even if Chris dismisses his mother's eerie words as a result of the effects of the medicine she is taking to soothe the pain, before dying, Grandma pleads to Billy, "I will be so lonely – I wish you could go with your Grandma," adding "far away, Billy – together, the two of us, just you and me." Her words carry some creepy connotations, since being together necessarily implies Billy's premature death. Grandma's wish on her deathbed calls to mind Billy's wish on his birthday, which symbolically marks her transition from her benevolent role as a fairy to her wicked part as a witch.

Billy seems to live in a trance once Grandma has passed away. Sylvia suspects that her son's almost catatonic state is due to the fact that Billy and Grandma were "too close," which may even hint subtly at a nearly incestuous relationship. Sylvia's words betray her jealousy, since, from Billy's perspective as a child, Grandma's omnipresence always relegated his own mother to the secondary role of the wicked stepmother in a fairy tale. In a deeply enigmatic scene, Billy beholds his reflection on the pond outside their house, which suggests some symbolic depersonalization, as Grandma gradually takes possession of the child. Billy's introspective nature suggests a precocious personality given his young age, particularly when his father asks him whether he can understand what death is and Billy nods confidently. As a precocious child, Billy looks young, but is aged inwardly, just as his grandmother looked aged, but exhibited a young spirit and strong will even in the last days of her life. Grandma and Billy symbolically lead a symbiotic existence, as her spirit imposes itself on Billy's soul and inhabits his body to make up for her physical absence. In the same way that Grandma's stubborn and childlike ways were disquieting, Billy's forlorn and precocious behavior as a child also proves deeply disturbing.

As Zicree argues, one of the most frightening implications of this episode lies in "the horrifying concept of a dead relative guiding a child toward suicide" (1992: 193). Billy spends his days and nights talking on the toy phone and, upon his mother's insistence to tell her who he is talking to, Billy resolutely admits that he has been speaking to Grandma and that she feels so lonely that he wants him to come and play with her. In response to Grandma's demands, Billy begins to fall prey to a series of self-imposed misfortunes, which appear to be the result of Billy's being possessed by Grandma's spirit. However, since it is Billy who seems to be responsible for exposing himself to danger out of his will, his actions may also betray the ludicrous strategies of a child to cope with grief and his incapacity to accept his grandmother's death.

Although this narrative hints at a feasible interpretation, the sequence of events points to a fantastic, rather than rational, explanation. Even if Billy's mother is convinced that her son's strange behavior responds to his childish fantasies, when she wakes up in the middle of the night and overhears Billy talking on the toy phone, she picks up the receiver and realizes, to her horror, that Grandma's breathing can be heard on the other side. In spite of her initial benevolent appearance, which complies with the culturally constructed and popular image of the granny, Grandma's evil spirit is portrayed as willing to drag Billy with her after her death even if this may imply taking his life. When Billy jumps into the pond and medical resuscitation procedures prove of no avail, out of despair, his father talks to Grandma on the toy phone, stating: "Mother, you said Billy gave you life again – now you can give him life – if you really love him, let him live – give him back." Since it is Chris's symbolic exorcism rather than any medical treatment that saves Billy's life, it is eventually confirmed that Grandma's evil spirit had taken possession of the young child and had been responsible for the misfortunes that nearly cause his death.

Against all odds, this episode problematizes the image of the benevolent granny, as she is transformed into a demonic spirit even capable of hurting her own kin owing to her unquenchable possessive and selfish character. The portrayal of Grandma Bayles complies with the characters of evil older women that Miller and Bowdoir van Riper refer to as

being initially presented as sympathetic victims whose strange behavior may be due to the fact that they can no longer exert control over their minds and bodies, although it is later revealed that something more sinister may be responsible for their eccentric conduct (2019: 7). As a character, Grandma Bayles calls to mind 'the monstrous feminine,' to use Barbara Creed's term, which endorses the connection between monstrosity and aging women, and is indicative of patriarchal anxieties about the female body in old age, thus conjuring ancestral fears of predatory females whose released instincts are considered particularly repulsive in their later years.

Conclusion

These four narratives display classic elements pertaining to the Gothic genre, in terms of settings, archetypal characters, and atmosphere which pave the way for the sinister to make its appearance. Isolated houses, ancient manors, wild landscapes, shabby basements, and cemeteries are locations in which the plot unfolds. Characters in these episodes such as Elva's fiancé, Anne Henderson, the young officer, Wanda Dunn, and Grandma Bayles are portrayed through features which are suggestive of Gothic archetypes. These characters are evocative of the zombie whose abject body becomes alive, the ghost who returns to avenge itself, the double who arises as a wise advisor and a reminder of death, the witch who threatens to repeal the spell of an apparently mesmerizing life, the vampire who wants to defy death but leads a life-in-death existence, and the demonic presence that alienates the familiar and must be exorcised. The creepy atmosphere in these narratives also contributes to creating a lingering sense of tension and strain by means of resorting to cold weather, storms, dark abodes, claustrophobia, decay, and a lingering feeling of helplessness and uncertainty.

In addition to displaying evident Gothic elements, these episodes are also thematically united insofar as they all explore fears and anxieties arising from the process of aging and the advent of old age. "Night Call" addresses fears related to aging badly, such as illness, dependence on

others, loneliness and, particularly, guilty memories from the past. In "Spur of the Moment," the dual structure on which the narrative is constructed tackles the prejudices against old age, while it also suggests feelings of regret in later years as a result of a careless and irresponsible youth. "Nothing in the Dark" addresses the dread of death which leads Wanda to develop a selfish and even antisocial character as a result of extreme fear and apprehension during the last stages of life. In "Long Distance Call," the death of the oldest member in the family paves the way to explore grief at the death of our beloved ones, but also to suggest the uncanny influence that obstinate and possessive elders may still exert on those relatives who outlive them.

Given the ambivalent nature that characterizes the horror genre and the idiosyncratic 'twilight' resolutions which became a trademark of the series, these four narratives evoke culturally assumed images of aging and old age which are gradually subverted and ultimately called into question. By means of a carefully-crafted narratological structure that plays with the audience's expectations and resorts to socially-established dictates about aging and widespread representations of the aged in popular fiction, conventional portrayals of elders are first evoked, subsequently problematized, and eventually disrupted. Drawing on Carroll's terminology about tales of dread, which comprise narratives that rely on poetic justice (2009, 29), "Night Call" and "Spur of the Moment" would fit this category, inasmuch as, in their later years, Elva Keene and Anne Henderson are respectively punished for the sins of their youth. Although Elva is first portrayed as a victim, her wicked deeds are eventually revealed, whereas, Anne's aging self is initially depicted as a source of the abject, but whose intentions ultimately prove to be good. To use Plantinga's terms, some episodes offer a change of prospects, as is the case with "Night Call," in which the mysterious caller turns out to be Elva's late fiancé who unveils her wicked deeds in spite of her frail appearance in old age, while, in "Long Distance Call," loving Grandma Bayles reveals her possessive personality as her evil spirit comes back to life. Conversely, other narratives rather propose a change of frame whereby the assumed picture of reality is reversed. In "Spur of the Moment, the aging woman who terrifies Anne happens to be

her aged double who chases her in order to prevent her from making a mistake in youth whose penalties she will have to pay in her old age. Similarly, in "Nothing in the Dark," Wanda Dunn's deeply-ingrained assumptions of death as terrifying are reversed, insofar as death is unusually portrayed as the visit of a handsome young man.

In some episodes, owing to dramatic irony, the spectator is more knowledgeable than the characters themselves, whereas, in other cases, important information about the character is upheld from the audience with the purpose of rendering this change of prospects effective. In "Night Call", viewers remain in a disadvantaged position in relation to Elva, its aged protagonist, since they remain ignorant of the wicked deed in her past. By contrast, in "Spur of the Moment", through a display of dramatic irony, young Anne is oblivious of the identity of the terrifying older woman who haunts her, whereas the audience is aware that the older woman in Anne herself. Some narratives rely on deflating surprises, which accentuate a rather pessimistic perspective, as happens in "Long Distance Call," whereby Grandma Bayles transforms from an apparently caring grandmother into an evil spirit, whereas other narratives resort to elevating surprises which make the episode end in a positive note, as happens in "Nothing in the Dark" and its rather alluring, and innovative, portrayal of death. Finally, some of these horror narratives emphasize their inherent ambiguity by means of offering open endings that foster different interpretations. In "Night Call," the calls that disturb Elva's lonely days in old age can be interpreted as either the punishment her fiancé wishes to inflict on her or the result of her guilty memories, while, in "Long Distance Call," Grandma Bayle's return as an evil spirit may be owing to her wicked nature, which she had been repressing for life or, rather, as a result of her grandson's emotional response upon coming to terms with the death of his beloved grandmother.

The narratological elements displayed in these narratives promote critical thinking, to use Plantinga's term (2009: 48), thus calling into question established sets of beliefs, ideological frameworks, and cultural assumptions in relation to old age. As the plot unfolds, conventional representations of elders are gradually transformed in favor of exposing

an ambivalent portrayal of old age which unveils the intricacies of the discourses of aging and openly explore latent, and even repressed, fears and anxieties about this later stage of life. Horror, thus, arises as an appropriate genre to explore social phobias about aging and old age in order to destabilize them and subvert them, ultimately revealing that stereotypical and social perceptions of old age are culturally constructed. As Carroll argues, the paradox of horror is that spectators are willing to experience fear as the price to indulge in the pleasures of narratives that nourish the belief of revealing the unknown (1990: 159). The horror narratives about aging from *The Twilight Zone* are rooted in this promise of disclosing interstices of eternal truths in relation to human and philosophical aspects of life and death. After all, as Clayton Johnson, writer of "Nothing in Dark" contends, *The Twilight Zone* "compares with any great work, from the Holy Bible almost, to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*" (Stanyard 2007: 177), given the transcendent issues it explores in all its episodes which all together make up an epic work that represents a milestone in American popular fiction and still exerts enormous influence on contemporary films of fantasy and horror.

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