

## The Gothic Representations of the City through the Flâneur in Victorian Literature

Sana Ayed Chebil

Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Sousse

[sanachebil@hotmail.com](mailto:sanachebil@hotmail.com)

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### Abstract

*The Victorian Gothic moved away from old and conventional themes and spaces of early Gothic novels such as ruined castles and evil villains into more realistic spaces and characters that went hand in hand with the issues of the era. While the conventional Gothic space centered on the castle or other forms of old buildings, the city was an important component in Victorian Gothic imagery. In an era of growing mediation between the city and the urban dwellers, the gothic representations of the urban space in Victorian literature highly depended on the 'eye' of its flâneurs, or walkers who see, interpret and produce the city. The fascination with modes of perceiving and seeing the mystery of the puzzling visual experience is evident in a wide variety of nineteenth and twentieth-century theories and research on urban space. This paper aims to graft some insights into the debate on urban visuality and other related tropes that provide a range of perspectives on the field of the visual and perception of the city. Then, drawing from Victorian novels, this paper examines Dickens's portrayals of urban subjects such as Gothic flâneurs who produce the city as a Gothic place.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of urban literature in the nineteenth century was host to various ranges of critical approaches. In this regard, it is important to consider the Victorian novel's literary transformations, including the shift from realism to fantastic mode of writings (Lehan, 2005), which, as seen above, necessarily intersected with the social and cultural shifts mentioned. The Urban Gothic was born from the relationship that was established between literature and urban life. Most critics assumed that the novel was linked to the urban genre in the nineteenth century, which was often a "description of the city milieu, its social relations and interactions with the metropolitan surroundings" (Plack, 2014, p. 138). In the nineteenth century, Victorian writers viewed the Gothic as a literary tradition that offered them alternative devices to the realist style of literature (Lehan, 2005). It was an era of great change in literary studies because of the Victorian novel's transformations. In this respect, the Urban Gothic developed with the emergence of a theoretical framework to underpin urban life and ambiguity of meanings. Its origin was rooted in the age of modernity, at the time when the Victorian novel appeared and when "the city [has become] synonymous with modernity and the novel was... a surrogate

through which the reader could enter and identify with the experience of [urban] modernity” (qtd. in Shapiro, 2010, p. 2).

## **2. THE GOTHIC GENRE**

The nineteenth century increasingly witnessed the domestication and urbanization of the Gothic that were manifested through the rise of a new Gothic landscape like the city, which served as a modern version of the exotic setting of early Gothic. In his discussion of the major shift in the Victorian Gothic fiction, Botting (1996) noticed the major departure from the remote space of the castle into the city, referring to the ‘domestication’ of Gothic devices within realistic settings: “The architectural and feudal background,” he argued, “the wild landscapes, the aristocratic villains and sentimental heroines, were no longer object of terror. Domestic, industrial, and urban contexts and aberrant individuals provided the loci for the mystery of terror. [...]; the dark alleyways of cities were the gloomy forests and subterranean labyrinths, criminals were the new villains, cunning and corrupt” (p. 40).

Moving from the medieval setting into the Victorian city, the first part of the theoretical background introduces the modern reading of urban texts that may present the Gothic aspects of urban space, including Roland Barthes’s (2005) theory of “Urban Semiotic” and its functions in understanding Victorian urban writings. This part introduces ideas about the relationship between the urban text and the production and negotiation of its meanings through the theoretical framework presented by modern theorists of urban perception, which is crucial to urban Gothic study. It demonstrates that the ‘Urban Semiotic’ analysis is fruitful for investigating the Gothic and ‘phantasmagoric’ city.

Most critics and theorists appeared to explore the city in the literature based on the degree of visibility and visibility, which was most often represented by lack of visibility, darkness, transparency, and knowability. The crucial attention of this study was to focus on the representations of invisibility and the exposition to the "invisible" city that also spoke for the invisibility of the medieval Gothic castle. The term 'Gothic' was used as a synonym for darkness and invisibility that was constantly used to encompass a broad degree of invisibility and barbarity in the Victorian city. While the medieval castle of the eighteenth-century Gothic was discovered and explored through the lens of the classical Gothic heroines and heroes whose gazes and walks in the castle gave readers access to the castle's darkness and visual barbarity, the nineteenth-century city was represented through the modern urban Gothic subjects. Modern references and repertoires about the act of visual observation could provide the guidelines and ‘vantage points’ through which these characters read the city.

### **2.1. The Urban Semiology: The Urban Uncanny**

This part employed the theoretical assumptions concerning the concept of ‘Urban Semiotic.’ Urban literature generated a large number of writings and critical approaches, including the ‘deconstructive’ reading of the urban text because of its context that deprived it of its unity (Barthes, 2005). ‘Urban semiotic,’ as defined by M. Gottdiener (2005), “is a branch of the semiotic study of settlement space, where the space is a city” (p. 101). This branch of semiotic study possessed several objects of analysis, including “the material structure of the built environment, the image of its inhabitants, the codes of meaning found articulating with space” (Gottdiener, 2005, p. 101). As such, urban semiotic requires viewing the city as a ‘text’ or a book that “has existed long as we have had a modern city literature” (Huysen, 2005, p. 76).

The transition of the Gothic genre from the medieval setting to the nineteenth-century city resulted from the Victorian writers’ attempts to bypass the unexplained and unrealistic sources of terror, concentrating instead on the contemporary issues and anxieties of the era (Ridenhour, 2013). This transition and the attempt to look for an alternative Gothic setting, in fact, were illustrated in most Victorian novels through which writers voiced the anxiety of urban life. Specifically, by the end of the nineteenth century, London was both “a dominant metropolis and a standard locus for narratives of terror” (Ridenhour, 2013). The Gothic novel’s shift from the medieval to urban setting contributed to new ways of reading and representing the Gothic, the Gothic that came hand in hand with the contemporary context. The mode emerged again to make the reader feel, and so see, “a glimpse of authentic life” (qtd. in Wolfreys, 2012, p. 81).

Critics looked at the city from several aspects: as a place bringing together the real and the unreal. In “Semiology and the Urban,” Barthes (2005) addressed the language of the city, assuming that “the city is a discourse,” having multiple interpretations as the relationship between the signified and signifier was “no longer be a fixed one-to-one relationship” (p. 159). The city, Barthes (2005) pointed out, “is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it” (p. 160). In urban spaces, the supernatural was expressed through the inability of ‘urban signs’ to have final meanings, leading to the creation of a meaningless urban space (Barthes 159). In this context, the signifieds were like “mythical creatures” and “transient” (162).

The Victorian novel entered into an era that welcomed the vocabulary of ghosts and haunting into the domestic space of everyday life (Mighall, 2003). Defining the Urban Gothic

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proposed a link with a specific historical moment. The Victorian era coincided with both the rise of urban literature and the impact of urbanization and industrialization on the Gothic genre. If writers like Walpole attempted to create the Gothic “to emphasize the historical distance between the ‘medieval’ Catholic Continent and eighteenth-century Protestant England,” Victorian writers looked at the Gothic mode in a realistic way through placing the events and characters in a realistic setting, the nineteenth-century city where all its elements were turned Gothic (Killeen, 2009, p. 5).

The Gothic literature was marked by the shift from external and unexplained supernatural elements that were associated with the traditional Gothic to the emphasis on contemporary sources of fear produced by the city environment. The urban text, as critics maintained, often produced supernatural elements through the presence of objects associated with the city that could not be defined. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (2012) introduced the term ‘hauntologie’, which was directly connected to the concept of ‘difference,’ revealing the idea that the meaning of signs was never stable but always changeable (p. 14).

The ‘urban uncanny’ was another source of the ‘urban semiotic,’ which provided an additional reading to the study of the urban space. Sigmund Freud provided a method of psychological readings of urban space, adding another framework of theorizing the urban space in relation to the Gothic. The concept of the ‘urban uncanny’ was applied to the phenomenon of the city. Freud utilized the term ‘uncanny’ as both an aesthetic and psychological category. In his essay, “The Uncanny” (Das *Unheimliche*), Freud (1995) suggested that the uncanny “is undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror” (p. 340). It undoubtedly belonged “to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror” and to “whatever excites dread” (Freud, 1995, p.19). Ultimately, through the Gothic, or its sub-genre, the uncanny, the gloomy representations of the city could be voiced. Various interpretations could explain the uncanny. For Derrida, the ghost required a deconstructive dimension; it was the presence of an object that couldn’t be defined (Blanco & Peeren, 2010). In this respect, deconstruction was particularly useful for demonstrating how the city became the place of haunting and supernatural creation. In other words, living in an urban space produced the uncanny, which was “an experience of disorientation, where the world in which we live suddenly seems strange, alienating or threatening” (qtd. in Eckhard, 2011, p. 48).

One of the early impacts of urbanization and industrialization was that it destroyed meanings. Julian Wolfreys (2012), in *Dickens’s London: Perception, Subjectivity, and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity*, assumed that London “requires a reading/writing faithful to

the forces of interruption and eruption, displacement, fragmentation and ruin, to seemingly illogical or incommensurate concatenations” (p. 210). As many Victorian realist novelists, Dickens attempted to change the conventional setting of the Gothic genre that was typically associated with distant times and places. In his hands, as maintained by Mighall (2003) in “Dickens and the Gothic”, the Gothic “moved from the remote and exotic to the familiar worlds of everyday existence. From fictions where plausibility was premised on their being distanced in time and space, horrors were now found in the very heart of the modern metropolis” (p. 94). His use of the Gothic genre to depict the city was a literary choice that came as a product of the context of industrialization and urbanization. What created the obstacles that separated the urban ‘signs’ from their fixed meanings rendering them hard to identify was an endless chain of urban elements such as the fog, the crowd, over crowdedness, and so forth. For instance, the “Dickensian London” often evoked a Gothic vision of “swirling fog, cobbled labyrinthine streets, with menace or mystery stalking their ways” (Mighall, 2003).

Ultimately, nineteenth-century urban literature consisted of a combination of natural and fantastic to voice the problems associated with urban life. Freud named this confrontation as the ‘urban uncanny.’ The uncanny elements associated with the urban environment were part of the city's gothic depiction. The latter acted as a ‘text’ that lacked a finite meaning, possessing an endless set of significations (Barthes 159). Metaphorically, as Barthes assumed, the city was reduced as a space that was read. Thus, the urban area could be considered a ‘discourse’, ‘writing,’ ‘a poem.’ However, the text did not possess fixed meanings, rather, containing a set of endless possibilities (Barthes, 2005). For Barthes (2005), urbanites might want all the elements of a city “can never be imprisoned in a full signification, in a final signification” (p. 162). In Barthes’s (2005) essay, the city was an ‘open’ text where the reader was like its street walker, unable to find a meaning and order (p. 162).

As Victorian Gothicists familiarized the genre's setting, the traditional Gothic fear of the “Continental Catholics and their nefarious activities” (Killeen 12) was resituated into the English home. Since the Gothic was relocated into an urban setting, the latter served a dual function “as both a powerful representation of modernity and its horrific underside” (Killeen, 2009, p.12). Domesticating the Gothic was directly associated with familiarizing the supernatural elements of earlier Gothic, producing new kinds of ghosts. The fusion of the Gothic and realist setting together within an urban text was one of the characteristic features of Dickens’s novels, which “constantly translates traditional Gothic tropes and props into modern realist terms, not to evacuate the Gothic or to strip it of power, but to project it into the institutions and the situations pervasive throughout England” (Killeen, 2009, p. 18). In this

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way, the Gothic “becomes more realistic, but the reality also becomes more like a Gothic nightmare...the labyrinthine dungeons of the Castle of Otranto and the monasteries of Maturin are replaced here by the tortuous and obscure nature of the suit in which all these characters are embroiled” (Killeen, 2009, p. 19).

The Urban Gothic emerged in the Victorian era as a product of industrialization that transformed the state of unity and harmony of pre-Victorian society, producing endless struggles between urban objects/ ‘signs’ and meanings. Concerned about the impact of the industrial revolution, the sub-genre led to the grotesque images associated with the urban environment. The nineteenth-century urban literature depicted the impacts of the urban-centered industry that contributed to the dehumanization of the human race that became associated with machinery (Black, 2014). The representation of urban text to be read or ‘deconstructed’ in a Victorian context was often meant to criticize industrialization by representing the antagonistic relationship between human beings and technology in which machines attempted to “exterminate the human race” (Black, 2014, p. 76). To this end, the urban uncanny and other urban theories attempted to present the loss of meaning because of the chaos accompanied by the industrial age. The Gothic in an urban environment often reflected the fears related to the nineteenth-century context, fears of “machines insinuating themselves into [industrialized]... society and even bodies that reflected anxieties about a potential inability to differentiate body from machine” (Black, 2014, p. 76).

### **3. THE GOTHIC FLÂNEUR IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE**

In view of the above, the study of the gothic representations of the city necessarily involves focusing on the figure of the flâneur. Urban literature and its dark depiction of the city demonstrate how the urban experience of the flâneur is closely linked to the gloomy depiction of urbanization that required further attention. The nineteenth-century novel focuses on a significant dimension of Urban Gothic, namely the importance of the flâneur in the gothic representations of urban literature. The term Gothic flâneur lies at the heart of the Urban Gothic and urban writing in general. Wolfrey (2012) identifies nineteenth-century urban writing assuming that “in its play of images nineteenth-century writings map the condition of the city onto the text itself, so that text assumes in a variety of ways the shape, the contours, the architecture, and the “ebb and flows”” (p. 14). These characteristics are also applied to the flâneurial writing. The flâneur’s representations of the city help reproduce the gothic associated with the urban space.

The placement of the Gothic in the city, rather than the castle, is accompanied by the appearance of a new urban character that voiced the gloomy side of the city. The Gothic interpretation of the urban text resonates with the perception of the urban space as a text whose reading is produced either by the narrator's eyes or by the flâneur's action of walking (Wolfreys, 2012). The flâneur, then, is useful as "a methodological trope because s/h is both attendant to modes of urban semiotic capitalism, the melancholia and fascination of the city, and...in the act of walking through cities, able to provoke profane illuminations as critical interventions into these urban spaces" (Thompson, 2015, p. 55). Reading the city and uncovering its meaning (Barthes 160) is also suggestive of the emergence of the new character who experiences the urban life and registered "the shock, transience and ephemerality of the modern city" (Thompson, 2015, p. 55).

### 3.1. Urban Perception

Most critics and theorists appear to explore the sub-genre of the Urban Gothic based on the visuality of the city, which is most often represented by a lack of transparency and knowability. The crucial attention of this study is to focus on the representations of urban illegibility and the exposition to the "invisible" city that also speaks for the invisibility of the medieval Gothic castle. As previously defined, the term 'Gothic' is used as a synonym for the darkness and barbaric structure of the castle that is constantly employed to encompass a fair degree of similarity on broad characteristics with the Victorian city. While the medieval castle of the eighteenth-century Gothic is discovered and explored through the lenses of the classical Gothic heroines and heroes whose gazes and walks in the castle make readers have access to the darkness and visual barbarity of the castle (Botting, 1996), the nineteenth-century city is represented through the modern urban Gothic subjects. Modern references and repertoires about the act of visual observation can provide the guidelines and 'vantage points' through which these characters read and produce the city.

The city is incorporated into literature "by multiple acts of imagination [and] is constantly invented and reinvented" (Nesher, 1998, p. 9). This part is used mainly in disjunction to the narrative function of the flâneur's walking in the city, which brings attention to modern theories of urban perception. It is an attempt to demonstrate a crucial correspondence between the binary thinking of walking and writing and the affinity between the pedestrian as the modern urban subject and the deconstructive and imaginative production of the city. Theorists refer to the crucial affinity between walking and writing the city. According to modern critics and theorists, a project of walking would involve "the pedestrian's relation to the city, then, is not one of knowledge and sight; rather it is one of "illegibility," guided more by *subjective desire*

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than any totalizing view or *objective*" (De Fazio, 2011). De Certeau (1984) also refers to this idea, assuming that the pedestrian is the modern figure who refuses to make "the complexity of the city readable" (p. 92). Therefore, the mutually constitutive couple of walking and writing can be rearticulated according to the complexity posed by the urban space.

Much of the passages in Dickens's novels reveal how the city is characterized by its reduced visibility, which adds to its gloomy atmosphere, an atmosphere that renders the city Gothic. The fog in the opening of the novel works to illustrate the Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*. The city furnishes the observer with a view that excludes reality and creates an image produced by the human subject's gaze. The fog creates half-visibility, and therefore its illegibility as well. In the opening of *Bleak House*, the city "becomes unrealistic via the fog that obscures it..." (Grub, 2016, p. 80). The fog blocks the trajectory of its viewers; therefore, the urban space is reduced to an intelligible text. "The fog" as Wolfrey (2012) puts it, "is one figure of writing, of the city writing itself, tracing its contours otherwise, writing the city as that which cannot be written of directly" (p. 158).

For de Certeau, walking is an urban practice that is accompanied by the creation of the fictional representation of the city: a walker engages in the 'text' of the city without being able to decode it (14). *Bleak House*, "which opens famously with a brilliantly visual description of vision obscured, presents the act of seeing as troubled, limited, and problematic from the outset" (Rignall, 1992, p. 40). The spectator's view, of course, is fragmented as he cannot see behind the veil of the fog. The visual field of the anonymous narrator, observing the city, recalls this pattern of the detective's blindness when he "mounts a higher tower in his mind" (Dickens, 1992, p. 820).

As the instance of the detective reminds us, urban illegibility needs to take into account both the representation of the city and the employed to depict the city. In *Bleak House*, readers have access to the "Gaslighting had spread quickly in London" and "Chiaroscuro effect" (Dickens, 2001, p. 4). In this respect, the city "becomes an urban text that denies transparency and visibility" (Rignall, 1992, p. 40). Therefore, the Urban Gothic is about the limits of reading—of achieving a panoramic view of the city. In contrast to the realist fiction, the writer no longer produces a stable and fixed perspective; however, the urban context increasingly moves from seeing things, which are marked by a stable point of view in favor of new strategies of observing and interpreting the objects of the gaze, rendering everything mysterious.

*Oliver Twist*, too, opens in a setting that is difficult to read. It offers the reader panoramic views of the city's chaos and places where "the very rats...were hideous with famine" (Dickens,



2001, p.80). While observing the city, Oliver performs the role of the flâneur, coming upon the following scene: “The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire” (Dickens, 2001, p. 146). With Bleak House, Oliver Twist inaugurated the city as a negative space; that is, it provides sublime anxieties associated with urban life.

To examine the notion of walking as writing, one has to classify walking as belonging to the figure of the flâneuse. Esther can be classified as a female traveler in the city who takes on the journey to search for her mother and identity. Her walking appears to rewrite the city and not mimic a given reality. Rignall (1992) suggests, “the anonymous narrator can be seen as a kind of flâneur who possesses the key to the streets and whose freely-ranging yet penetrating gaze can make sense of the urban labyrinth which baffles and repels the innocent eye of Esther Summerson[...] by exploring the fictional world of London and suggesting ‘ways of reading the mystifying systems of signs’” (p. 65). Like the detective, Esther undergoes the same experience of the one who is lost within the labyrinth. Her first experience of London is of a labyrinth of: “the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world [...] and in such a distracting state of *confusion* that [she] *wondered* how people kept their senses...” (Dickens, 1992, p. 76).

One of the most compelling urban studies figures closely associated with the process of reading and interpreting the urban landscape is the flâneur. In *Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature*, the flâneur is defined as a key feature of Gothic writings where he finds himself subject to the violent atmosphere of the urban space (Hughes, 2013). The characters who walk in the Gothicized city “are in unfamiliar territory; no map is available to guide them to safety. The minotaur, the only creature truly comfortable on the streets of darkest London, lurks in wait for the unwary; encounters with the inhabitants of labyrinthine London realize the fears inherent in the Gothic *flâneur*, making concrete the uncertainty and dread in the heart of the modern cityscape” (Ridenhour, 2013). Flânerie, thus, becomes a method for demonstrating the dark side of the urban space. The city becomes “a lived text” through this figure that provided the way in which space “is claimed and interpreted through the act of walking,” (Stevenson, 2003, p. 69).

Rather than looking directly at urban signs such as streets, rooms, the reader, with the intrusion of this modern figure in Urban Gothic texts sees these ‘signs’ from the narrative ‘eye’ that belonged to the ‘phantom narrator’ (Wolfreys, 2012). The flâneur engaged in the production of the Gothic depiction of the city, contributing to the interaction between the city and its walkers in the urban text in which the reader “come to be in that place, seeing from that

perspective, and given perception that is no longer solely that of the narrator, but equally not only, originally, [of the reader]" (Wolfreys, 2012, p. 9). The modernity of the urban Gothic is not only related to the location of the Gothic in the space of the city, but also through the appearance of its modern observer, the flâneur who "are walkers, *wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of urban 'text' they write about without being able to read it" (De Certeau 93).

Walking in the city, for instance, transforms the "planned and readable city" available to into "*migrational*, or metaphorical, city" (DeCerteau, 1984, p. 93), thereby inviting the possibilities of urban Gothic. In this respect, the walker "transforms each spatial signifier into something else" (De Certeau, 1994, p. 98). A "semiotic of the city" perceived the city as a "text" "created by human beings in space, spoken by and speaking to those who inhabit it, move through it, and observe it" (Carlson, 1989, 11). In the Victorian era, the Gothic, 'semiotic,' 'uncanny' reading of the urban text shares the urban location with another kind of perceiver, who is the flâneur. The latter is part of the definition of the flâneur who constructs a kind of urban eye. "Dickens's narrating subject," for instance, as Wolfreys (2012) maintains, "is no mere consciousness any more than he is just an eye or lens; he is a figure—on occasions named Boz—who is both *in* and *of* the crowd, and whose ability is to transport the reader to that place, on to those streets" (8). What we saw as readers, in entering the city, particularly, London, as Wolfreys (2012 assumes in *Dickens's London*, is not composed "of things borrowed from the real world. Instead, we enter into an imaginary, which is simultaneously very close and further away from the 'actual' (p. 9). Many writers, including Dickens's narration, "give vision...the imaginary texture of the real" (qtd. in Wolfreys, 2012, p. 9).

More broadly than the focus on the visual impacts of the detective gaze, the urban context of Dickens's novel explains one of the most dramatic elements: its strategy of turning the city into a text. For instance, in *Bleak House*, Bucket turns the crowd into a text and its elements into a mystery. Within the urban landscape and in association with the urban female figure, the detective finds a more complex playground; the detective-figure of Dickens performs the similar strategy of turning his view into a text, yet the latter is accompanied by the inability to read someone's identity. While pursuing the criminal type, the detective is the urban subject "who lacks an overview of the metropolitan whole, who is denied any panoramic or bird's-eye perspective" (Gillock & Benjamin, 2001, p. 224). His view of the city becomes limited, so he is "not a privileged spectator" but "granted only an ant's-eye view" (Gillock, 2001, p. 244). The gaze of the detective attempts to give insight into the lack of transparency, invisibility, the gloomy and darkened urban environment.

### 3.2. Phantasmagoria

It is important to consider that urban *flâneurs* and *flâneuses*, who are often “enmeshed in a world of enthroned meaninglessness, are also producers of ethnographic texts” (McLaren, 1997, 151). Walking through the city participates in the representations of the Gothic elements of the urban space, producing, like the urban writer, a Gothic text. In the same ways, Frisby (200) perceives the concept of the *flâneur* as the producer of narrative texts: “[T]he activity of the *flâneur* is not exhausted in strolling, observing or reading the signifiers of the modern metropolis [and] the production of texts on that modernity” (p. 96). In Urban Gothic literature, walking through the city can be a literary response to major problems of the urban environment in the nineteenth century, when “a new world marked not only by teeming crowds of people, but by unprecedented advances in technology such as the gas lamp, and the birth of consumer culture ...” (Nicol, 2013, p. 75).

The emphasis on the necessity of the employment of imagination against a realistic depiction of the world is a characteristic feature of Dickens (Hollington, 1984) and many nineteenth-century writers’ attempts to rely on the grotesque aspects of the urban environment. Many writers during the nineteenth century, like Benjamin, represent “the phantasmagoric lenses” of the *flâneur*, perceiving urban life as a ‘phantasmagoria’ of industrialization and urbanization that period goes through: “The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned the *flâneur*” (qtd. in Boym, 2010, p. 126).

In *Bleak House*, Dickens takes the reader on a tour of the urban streets of Tom-All-Along’s that is depicted as a gothic milieu marked by the ambiguity of undifferentiated identities and invisibility. With the “mole’s eye” view of the city, the previously distanced observer of the city decides to enter the city’s hidden spaces. Inspector Bucket, Darly, and Mr. Snagsby typify the role of the *flâneurs* who are mesmerized by the view of the city crowd. They encounter a crowd that looks “like a dream of horrific faces” (Dickens, 2001, p. 307). The detective first decides to view the city by “mounting the tower,” which proves the invisibility of the urban space. Following this, he descends into the streets; his physical encounter with the urban environment can be seen as a visual plunge into the urban environment. The gaze moves inward from the street to the crowd to a terrifying impact drawn from the look at the crowd and its fictional, uncanny, and phantasmagoric representation.

It seems that Bucket’s encounter with the crowd, an encounter that is achieved through the distanced gaze of the detective, might very well be read as an encounter with a text. In the same way, he enhances the view of the city as a text that transforms him into the reader of the urban

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environment. To return to Bucket's gaze at the crowd, Dickens demonstrates the very relationship between the city and the crowds that is specific to the Urban Gothic. The "many legs" observed by the detached gaze of Bucket at the crowd demonstrates that individuals are deprived of their personal identities, becoming inhuman, monsters or supernatural in themselves. It is one theme which Dickens most notably explores through a recurrent persistent image: that of the illegible crowd.

In "The Flâneur and the Grotesque Figures of the Metropolis in the Works of Charles Dickens and Charles Baudelaire," Vila-Cabanes (2015) assumes that the urban grotesque conveys the "crises of urban life in which everything lost its meaning and became symbolic of "the paradoxes of the modern culture" (p. 114). To give an example, Hollington (1984) assumes that both Baudelaire and Dickens view the mud of the city as representative of human corruption (p. 91). To further criticize the urban life, the city was "deconstructed" by the flâneur to criticize the impact of the industrial age on human psychology, producing an urban text that cannot be read without noticing the "uncanny," "the grotesque" that the urban signs produced. For example, the human body in Urban Gothic is no longer the conventional one. It becomes either "automatized" or "animalized." For many Victorian writers, the machine explicitly stands for "the dehumanized cruelty of industrialization, as evidenced in the works of Charles Dickens..." (Rapatzikou, 2004, p. 13).

The term phantasmagoria represents the "experience of movement, of a procession of things before the eyes [and] suggests a quality of life that is ghost-like or dream-like" (Pile, 2005, p. 3). Indeed, in the nineteenth century, a variety of various means of image projection were introduced. Phantasmagoria is also the product of urban flânerie. Water imagery most often represented through the Thames of the city was Gothicized in urban areas and was depicted threateningly. For instance, Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller* (2004) represents how flânerie described the Thames as having: "an awful look, the buildings on the banks were muffled in black shrouds, and the reflected lights seemed to originate deep in the water as if the specters of suicides were holding them to show where they went down" (p. 140). Accordingly, water in an urban environment carried the imagery of death, "black shrouds" and "specters of suicides," destroying the conventional imagery of water that was associated with purity and cleanliness.

The increased size and rapidity of the crowd, stressed in the novel within the detective narrative, dehumanizes the crowd members, contributing to their mechanical appearance. In *Bleak House*, Dickens is fascinated by the encounter between the urban stroller and the uncanny

crowd. Esther describes the "crowds of people whom the pleasanter weather seemed to have brought out like many-colored flowers" (Dickens, 2001, p. 51). The crowd is depicted as "flitting, and whistling, and skulking" (260) or as "an unearthly fire, gleaming [...] on all the faces of its many thousands of wandering inhabitants, [...] as solemn as might be" (Dickens, 2001, p. 353).

The illegibility of the city can also be contingent upon class, gender, and the whole cultural context. In *Bleak House*, the flâneuse's involvement in the streets of London demonstrates the threat and danger that urban women face when exposed to the urban environment in contrast to her male counterpart. For her, the city streets at night are "so nightmarishly phantasmagoric" "that the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real" (Dickens, 2001, p. 829).

One of the main reasons for the demise of the difference between human beings and machines in the eyes of the flâneur was the harmful impacts of industrialization upon the writer and the urban walker. This inability to distinguish humans from machines or animals in nineteenth-century urban literature was used mainly for critical purposes. Dickens, as Fred Kaplan (1988) assumes in *Dickens: A Biography*, opposed "the proponents of industrial and laissez-faire [who] continued their effective advocacy of a free-market economy and social system in which the laws of supply and demand could not be managed for social and humanitarian purposes" (p. 305). As such, Dickens subjects his urban characters to different 'metamorphoses,' often comparing them to mechanical apparatuses to create an ironic or grotesque effect (Hollington, 1984). Such reference to this grotesque interaction constructs the fear associated with the domestic elements of the Victorian Gothic, a Gothic that offers the possibility of moving away from unrealistic sources of terror, concentrating more closely on the familiar aspects of the modern world. The machine imagery produces the fear and terror emerging from the outcomes of the industrial revolution and the changes brought by machines. As a means of social criticism during the Victorian era, the urban text can lead to the uncanny and gothic depiction of city life viewed most often by the flâneur, contributing to the creation of the grotesque that coincides with the sterility and disorder of industry (Frisby, 2000). In fact, "oxymorons, juxtapositions, hyperboles, and the technique of humanized objects and dehumanizing people are frequent aesthetic devices employed by Dickens and Baudelaire in order to create grotesque images in their *flâneur* writings" (Vila-Cabanes, 2015, p. 114).

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Tracing the Gothic through the urban landscape, the ghosts and the supernatural elements related to this space were often represented through the flâneur's eyes. Thomas Hardy, for instance, refers to the ghosts and monstrous creations born out of the crowd, assuming that "as the crowd grows denser, it loses its character of an aggregate of countless units, and becomes an organic whole, a molluscos, black creature having nothing in common with humanity" (qtd. in Williams, 1975, p. 216). Being a walker of the city, the flâneur participates in the Gothic depiction of the city, reflecting the impact of the mechanization of the industrial age on its streetwalkers. The industrial metropolis "became a landscape of techno-aesthetics, a dazzling, crowd-pleasing dream world that provided total environments to envelop the crowd. Cosmic proportions, monumental solidity, and panoramic perspectives were the characteristics of this new urban phantasmagoria" (Buck-Morss, 1995, p. 6). For Dickens and Benjamin, as DeFazio (2011) assumes, modern city life was "phantasmagoric" because of "the vast number of the juxtaposition of visual signs such as...heterogeneous crowd [that made] the urban experience dreamlike and ghostly" (14).

In thinking about the Urban Gothic, it is important to focus on the flâneur and his urban gaze. The latter demonstrates that looking is very important and not just looking but interpreting the chaotic qualities of the modern world (Boym, 2010). The 'physiologies' of the flâneur is reminiscent of Simmel's (2004) theory of the flâneur's visual interaction in the modern space, arguing that in an urban environment, seeing became more important than hearing. The Urban Gothic is often articulated through the flâneur's urban gaze. The ruins, crowd, and other urban elements characterizing the urban life render the sense of hearing less present and constitutive of the Gothic in urban text (Simmel, 2004). In fact, Louis Huart comments in his *Physiologie du Flâneur* that this urban type "needs above all good eyes to be aware of every pretty merchant, every *grotesque* face" (54). The latter is the product of the study of urban elements from his eye, a study which requires the mediation between the real world and the mental image reflected or constructed (Vila-Cabanes 114). In the urban Gothic novel, London "becomes more than just a convenient stage set; the topography of the city, the experience of walking its streets, even the language various writers used to represent these events contribute to creation of a Gothic identity that became one of the dominant images of the nineteenth-century London" (Ridenhour 12). The London of Dickens, like the Paris of Baudelaire, is replete with "phantasmagoric figures which arouse the curiosity of the stroller, turning the metropolis into an almost unreal space" (Vila-Cabanes 114).

The urban literature of this time period "welcomes precisely the glimpses afforded by the "illogical" sequence of the walker's perception" (Barta, 1996, p. 13). Most of the nineteenth-

century texts provide “prototypes of a literal reading of reality in which faces, streets, and scenes became semiotic extensions of modernity” (Gleber, 1995, p. 364). In the sketches given by the flâneur, “[p]erception and translation of the world”, as pointed out by Wolfreys (2012), “offers something more than a skiagraph and less than fully rendered mimetic representation” (p. 42). The appearance of this new urban character and the experience of urban walking in the nineteenth-century literature inspire new methods to modernity, often based on the flâneur’s ‘gaze’ that opens new possibilities for voicing the gothic and chaotic depiction of the modern world (Frisby, 2000).

The experience of walking practiced by the flâneur in the nineteenth-century literature involves producing and creating the gloomy and dark face of the city. The main characteristics of the Early Urban Gothic, as Donovan maintains, are the experience of “uncanniness, wandering through unrecognizable sections of the city, and anonymity amid crowds of strangers, [that often] illustrate how an inability or unwillingness to interact with others on the streets imperils identity” (Donovan, 2009, p. 5-6). Zygmunt Bauman (2003) points in *City of Fears, City of Hopes*, “strangers are likely to meet in their capacity of strangers and likely to merge as strangers from the chance encounter which ends as abruptly as it started” (p. 14). Here, a rural/urban dichotomy is obvious, for if the country was perceived as a paradigm of the “knowable community,” living in the city means being exposed to the threat of the foreign and the other (Williams, 1975, p. 245). This sense of urban life as “essentially mysterious and unknowable immediately lends itself to gothic representations of the city” (Coverley, 2012, p. 14).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In this article, the theoretical background introduces the modern reading of urban texts that may present the Gothic aspects of urban space, including Roland Barthes’s theory of “Urban Semiotic” and its functions in understanding Victorian urban writings. This article introduces ideas about the relationship between the urban text and the production and negotiation of its meanings through Barthes’s theoretical framework, which is crucial to urban Gothic study in this respect. The rise of the urban novel stimulates the research and paper on the study of the Gothic in the urban semiotic tradition. It explains how the latter must also be read in its historical context.

Modern theories can be a helpful theoretical model for representing the gothic dimension of the urban space. It can also produce a helpful basis of how the real spaces of the Victorian city are read and transformed by the receiving subject creating the supernatural element of the

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city. This type of Gothicity of the urban space is what the flâneur experienced in the city, producing anxieties around reading the urban space and different unachievable attempts to construct the Victorian city's image as a home. The 'semiotic transition' experienced by the urban subject, most often by the flâneur, leads to the production of the ghosts of the city, associating it with the supernatural elements of the gothic genre. The sense of profusion of the real and unreal within in the urban space creates a strong anxiety to the industrial and urban spaces.

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**AUTHOR'S BIO**

*Sana Ayed Chebil is a Ph.D. holder in English Literature from The Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse, Tunisia. The title of my Doctoral dissertation is The Urban Gothic in Oliver Twist, Bleak House, and Great Expectations. I am a Business English teacher in the Higher Institute of Finance and Taxation.*