

The Mad Doll in the Attic: Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* as Female Gothic for the Neoliberal Age

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Peter Tupper describes Joss Whedon's television series *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) as "21st Century Neo-Gothic" because, among other reasons, the Gothic "explor[es] the effect of power on the individual" (2010, p.60). "In *Dollhouse*," he observes, "that power is corporate and technological" (*ibid.*): a pharmaceuticals company operates a secret network of 'Dollhouses' in which employees known as Dolls have their minds regularly wiped and reprogrammed to carry out 'engagements' at the behest of rich clients.

In particular, this paper will argue, *Dollhouse* resembles the subgenre of Gothic which Ellen Moers dubbed 'Female Gothic:' narratives that typically "revolve around an innocent... heroine threatened by a powerful male figure and confined to a labyrinthine interior space" (Brabon and Genz 2007, p.5). While, as many critics have pointed out, the original 18th and 19th century examples functioned as metaphors for women's confinement in domestic spaces by a patriarchal social structure, *Dollhouse* shows how women (and, to a lesser extent, men) are controlled and exploited by the capitalist entertainment and sex industries.

If the Gothic as a mode exposes the fissures in rational, Enlightenment values, *Dollhouse's* concern is with uncovering the dark side of supposedly rational neoliberal principles. In the process, as this paper will demonstrate, it draws on many familiar Female Gothic tropes such as the return of the repressed, the doubling of the heroine and the "discovery of the Hidden Woman" (Delamotte 1990, p.153).