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**Comic Gothic in Children's Literature: A Study of Denial Handler's
The Bad Beginning from A Series of Unfortunate Events**

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Requirements for the Degree of Master in Anglophone Language, Literature and
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Dedication

I dedicate my thesis work to my parents and my brother Farid, his wife and his daughter. To my sisters Radya, meryem, sara and their kids. With a special feeling of gratitude to Abdallah for his words, help, encouragement and push, also for being there for me throughout the entire thesis realization and I wish him the success in his career.

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Abstract

The present study is aimed at investigating how the Comic Gothic elements are incorporated in children's literature. The study examines the chosen theme in Daniel Handler's novel *The Bad Beginning* which was published in 1999. The book is the first in the series under the title *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The present study finds that the Comic Gothic incorporation in the novel contributes in the development of the children's literature as a genre due to the different literary techniques which have been included. Moreover, Handler's style helps in the development of the child reader's cognitive and emotional aspects as the dark Gothic is converted in a comic manner.

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Introduction

In literature, children have deserved a literature of their own, a literature which is termed after them known as children's literature. Children's literature describes the set of books which are addressed to children in order to entertain them. Moreover, children readers are not the only audience of the genre; it has also received the attention of the adult readers too. What characterizes children's literature is the child based character in most of the cases since the genre represents the lives, adventures and dreams of childhood which are communicated throughout the plot of the story. In addition, children's literature makes use of illustrations to portray themes as innocence, happiness and hope. Most importantly, children's literature is characterized by its didactic nature through which children learn about the world. Among the major pioneers of children's literature are: John Newbery, Lois Lowry, J.K Rowling, Lewis Carroll, Philip Pullman and many others.

The present study will examine the Comic Gothic blending in children's literature, and more specifically; in Daniel Handler's *The Bad Beginning* from a series entitled *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.. The study will discuss the Gothic fusion in children's literature and will investigate how the Comic is assimilated within the two (the Gothic and children's literature) and most importantly the present study will highlight the impact of such fusion on the child reader.

Throughout the history of literature, children have in a way or another represented the child of each era whenever they got a chance to be part of any literature. They have adopted and symbolized all what is it associated to childhood, expectations, what is it fantastic and imaginary and most importantly adventurous. The core of present study is about the integration of two contradictory literary modes in the youngsters' genre, in addition to the dramatization of the gothic adventure of the three orphaned characters of Handler. The

characters' experience in the first book of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* entitled *The Bad Beginning*; embedded in the dark humorous atmosphere which aims at investigating Handler's selection of such literary blending in a work which is delivered to children.

This thesis will approach Daniel Handler's *The Bad Beginning* from an analytical perspective, especially since the thesis will seek to find out the different parameters and investigate the role behind blending Gothic and Comic elements in the selected case study. In addition, the study will make use of other approaches and disciplines whenever it is necessarily; worth to be mentioned psychoanalytical approach.

The existence of the present study is attributed to the limited attention toward the elements of the studied topic, as far as, there is not much studies which have been held about the Comic Gothic in children's literature and mainly in Handler's series. Also, the present study marks the beginning for further investigation to be held in the field of literature in regards to the Comic, the Gothic and the children's literature fusion.

The Bad Beginning is written by Daniel Handler. The book was first published in 1999 in the USA; it is the first book of 13 books from *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The events of the series turn around the three young Baudelaire's siblings after their parents' death in a fire. Violet, Klaus and Sunny pass through a series of adventures as they are hosted by many relatives of their parents, among them Count Olaf who wants to steal their fortune. While, the Baudelaire orphans try to escape Count Olaf and the series of disasters which will take place, the young Baudelaires end up finding a secret organization which may reveal the reason of their parents' death.

The present study is divided into three chapters. The first is a theoretical chapter which will provide an overview of the nature and development of Children's literature as well the Gothic genre and most importantly will show how the two are blended together. The second

chapter will be mainly about the author, the novel of *The Bad Beginning* and will investigate what makes the case study gothic. Finally, the third chapter will show how two contradictory trends, in this case the gothic and comic, work together and how they are manifested in the novel, furthermore, the chapter will shed light on the impact of such assimilation on the child reader

Many studies were held in relation to Children's literature; however, only few scholars had devoted their works to children's literature in regards to the comic gothic blending in certain texts. The present study will examine Handler's *The Bad Beginning* in order to show how the Gothic Comic elements are incorporated in the novel's building and to present the effect of such unusual fusion on the readers.

Chapter One: Children's Literature: A Window on the Comic and Gothic Moods

A side from the set of written works; literature has evolved throughout history especially in terms of the thematic building and the formal construction. What makes one literature different from the other literary productions is its genre with all of its aspects, but most importantly in recent history the audience or to whom literature is addressed. The audience is revealed as the most prominent factor which determines what literature is about. No one can deny the impact of such factor in the form and the content of any literary production. Most of the modern and contemporary writers have devoted much of their interest of literary creation to a newly developing kind of readers, which were neglected for a long period of time in their writings even though they are considered to be the largest portion affected by books embedded as children.

The first chapter is a theoretical based orientation about the key elements of the topic of the study. The chapter is divided into three main sections as the following: the first section is about answering questions as: what is children's literature about? What are its origins whenever they did exist? And how did it develop to reach such success? The second section is devoted to the gothic literature as a new genre. The third section is about how the writers can integrate the 'Comic' and 'Gothic' elements in children's literature, and how this adoption of such mixture can affect the transmission of the writer's message.

I.1. Children's Literature: Origins and Development

Many scholars admitted that throughout the very first documentations of the human beings production (language) children had a little or no reference at all. It is only in the recent decades when children have gained an important status being the subject of interest for

writers? Since children readers are no longer treated the same way as adults, because they need more care while writing to them (A. Williams 151).

Children were and still are a matter of question for a number of scholars while historicizing literature. Among those scholars is John Rowe Townsend, who questioned the existence of children as readers which according to him is more important than questioning the literature which they are concerned with (Rudd 3). Another contribution is questioning the importance of children in the world of literature believes that children do exist everywhere in their readings once they read and perceive the world without cultural boundaries and geographic borders stressing the universality of the books they are dealing with (O'sullivan 13).

Despite the fact that children for a long period of time were reading different texts and materials derived from that of the adults, there was an age when children have gained their own literature which is addressed to them and can be read by a wide range of audiences. They deserved a literature which is entitled Children's Literature. As the name indicates it is defined in relation to the children as an audience and as a subject of interest in the literary production. Many scholars define this genre in relation to a set of characteristics and aims. Andrew McMurry in his "Children's Literature: A Rhetorical Analysis" asserts, "Children's literature is a genre with a variety of interesting and effective rhetorical techniques seeking to entertain children and educate them about the fundamentals in life" (3). That is to say, it is a genre aimed at entertaining the children and educating them while asserting different aims as he has suggested; that this literature with its effective techniques helps in introducing children to the reading itself while they are educating them about the different aspects of life.

Karin Lesnik-Oberstein in the "Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?" introduces another definition, as he states: "The definition of 'children's

literature' lies at the heart of its endeavour: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children"

(1). According to Lesnik-Oberstein children's literature is the set of books which are associated to certain group of audience in this case are children. Lesnik-Oberstein also stresses the idea that children books do address children in a simple language mainly in order to cover moral lesson or social value (17). Moreover, Lesnik-Oberstein notes that it is needed "...to differentiate books used for didactic or educational purposes from 'children's literature'" (21).

In its broadest sense children literature can be identified in terms of the group of books which share the same characteristics and has to do with the books children do read. Other critics went further to describe children literature, adults based literature despite the fact that it is read by children yet what do they read is determined by the adults as needs (Pons 4). In "The Development of Children's Literature", David Rudd has described children's literature in terms of: "certain interest and needs" which are in their turn determined by the adult as needed to be achieved and acquired, yet these needs and interests have developed and changed over time (3). Other critics as Jack Zipes opposes this notion of children's literature all together since children really do not have a literature of their own —i.e., produced and read by them, however, they read what the adult produce as theirs and for them and even the selection of the books is already determined for them (qtd. in Pons 4).

The idea of recognizing children as readers has long been established as Cullinan states: "Throughout history children have not always been seen and treated as they are today, but rather as 'miniature adults'" (qtd. in McMurry 4). According to Townsend children's literature did not exist before a revolutionary period which is crowned by producing books only for children. Children's literature is the result of an age of development which has affected the different social, economic and cultural aspects of the European continent, this

period has affected the child by becoming an interest of a set of products in which books were included —i.e., it is seen as a commercial brand for the adults' production (qtd. in Pons 5). However, Peter Hunt, in his work entitled "Introduction: the World of Children's Literature Studies", further argues that the child reader is not a passive receiver but: "in children's literature, the 'reader' is a much more obviously immanent character" (4).

Regardless to the notion of belonging to one nation, which the book is addressing or addressed to, children's literature preserves the human attachment which goes beyond the physical borders as Emer O'sullivan, in his "Internationalism, the Universal Child and the World of Children's Literature", states: "Children's books keep a live a sense of nationality; but they also keep a sense of humanity ..." (12). As a result, the fact that children read books leads to the creation of another dimension of attachment to reach the other races through the feeling of brotherhood and life style due to the exchange of literary productions resulting in a kind of shared moral values and literary traditions (O'sullivan 13-14).

Before any classification concerning the development of children's literature, a number of questions arose out of the need to know about its origins; more likely to be asked what makes this literature emerge and develop and what text genre is characterized by? Embedded in the genre of folktales, myths and legends, originally, children's literature was transmitted to its audiences verbally. In the early years of literature to the recent ones, children became a faithful audience that deserved their own literature.

Concerning the development of this new literature; a set of models and factors have shaped and affected this process as the social, political contexts (family, colonialism) and educational standards. One of the models is introduced by Zohar Shavit, who states: "the universal structural traits and patterns common to all children's literature" (qtd. in O'sullivan 15). Based on the model Shavit has introduced; it is concluded that the children's literature is developed initially on the trace of the adults' literature. Furthermore, she explains how the

same stages of development of any literature are set to occur in the child's literature, despite its context of evolution and setting of emergence.

The area of investigation is extended with Gillian Adams in his work entitled "Ancient and Medieval Children's Texts"; Adams attempts to contextualize and historicize the new field of children's literature. According to Adams this development is dated back to the ancient civilizations which have witnessed the evolution of the field of children's literature. A different angle of study is to trace back children's literature in the major ancient civilizations the world ever knew as it is associated to the reading and writing experiences. Among his analysis, Adams has tackled the study of the field in terms of a series of questions mainly about the nature of the children's books.

The act of writing has long been established and associated to the Mesopotamian civilization consequently reading as well took place. The first versions of written forms had begun as Clay tablets mainly were associated to commerce. Schooling was preserved only to males mainly from the upper social classes. One can date back the very first literary documentations from Sumer were around 2400BC; during which some of the texts were addressed to children. Mainly the Mesopotamian texts had covered the Sumer culture, proverb, sentence style and features. Most importantly, the Mesopotamian Culture had provided a literary heritage in addition to that of the previously originated in commerce, the educational texts for children which were mainly diverted from the adult compositions, which got a share of such flourishment. The interest in a literature which had been read by adults as well as children was to a large extent influential for the different components of civilization as well the successors or the neighboring ones (Adams 227).

Moving to the Egyptian ancient civilization which was not an exception; during (1545-1085 BC) the country witnessed a kind of flourishment and prosperity which affected the whole sectors especially literature and arts. The ancient Egyptian schooling took place at

two stages only; the first one is for children and the second for the post graduates. Unlike the Sumerians school texts, the Egyptians celebrated their gods and especially the Nile (Adams 227-228). The Egyptian civilization had delivered one of the major works in the history of children's literature entitled: *Instruction of Khety* (Adams 231).

Another civilization in which children texts are detected over its literature is the Greek. The Greek schooling was not necessary before the age of seven years and was preserved only to boys. At earlier ages children were introduced to the different kinds of literature stories, fables, legends and myths about super heroes or animals orally. However, schooling confronted them more with direct performances in theatre mainly, and they were asked to summarize and elaborate some works and read them loudly in class. But what characterizes really the Greek children's literature is the Hellenistic period. Heiserman further explained that the Hellenistic period is known as the period which witnessed the popularity of a new genre among children of the Middle Ages known as Romance (qtd. in Adams 232).

The medieval period is characterized by the high rates of illiteracy among the population, in which schooling was headed by the clergy. Also during this period students read shorter texts in Latin about saints, fables... etc. The children became a part of literature's dramas, as well as, some works were dedicated to them. Religious texts also were the most important part of the clergy education, and in the literary they studies are regarded inseparable from children's literature (Adams 235-6). Children at this stage were reading according to the society of that period for the sake of education more importantly for salvation (McMurry 5). As David L Russell further argues that it is with 1600s and 1700s, the child gained an important position in the society and this perception had evolved especially with the making of special forms of children's literature; mainly those ones which projected the society's beliefs, values and its perception toward the new child reader (qtd. in McMurry 5).

The 1800_s and 1900_s were crowned by the Victorian period, which was the golden age for the flourishing and prosperity of the different arts and literatures and children's literature was not an exception. At this period children's literature is no longer of educational grounds only, but also is found for pleasing and entertaining the child reader. Yet, children's literature was not that interesting field for a number of writers who later on turned to it as an exciting work shop and witnessed the growth and the world's recognition among the literatures of the world (McMurry 6).

Over the past decades, children's literature is set to take an important role in the field of learning especially at first levels of schools. Due to its simple language, shorter size and interesting plot and characters, students have learned about how to read and develop such skill at the very first stages, as reading becomes the key element for developing critical minds. The evolution of children's literature is affected by what is known as the Gothic literature, which becomes inseparable from children's literature as it has a significant contribution in the youngsters literature in a way or another.

I.2. Gothic Literature: A General Overview

This section of the study is more concerned with the Gothic literature; its essence, origins and development. First of all, one needs to identify what this literature is about; since the Gothic is problematic along its history. The meaning of the Gothic has been changed in the society of literature in comparison to the old and previous connotations of the term. However, scholars of the field have agreed on the essential and basic criteria of the term as it denotes darkness, mystery and horror. As a result the critics have attempted to state the most working definitions of this genre of prose depending on the features of each historical period.

The emergence of the Gothic as a new genre of prose is associated with the change in the cultural recognition especially in the eighteenth century, an age which has marked the

shift in the essence of the term “Gothic. The term first was used to refer to the “Goths” the barbarian northern tribes. The Goths are a set of tribes who were influential to the British politics; as far as these tribes elected their chiefs at a communal gathering seems like the parliament nowadays (Miles 11-12).

The Gothic has shifted to be a descriptive to all what has to do with the medieval age. An additional contribution to what the Gothic refers to is a contradictory version of all what is it “classical”; this connotation shaped Gothic as “chaotic”, “ornate and convoluted”, “represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the Uncivilized” (Punter and Byron 28). The Gothic has been revived by the eighteenth century; a radical change had swept the fields of architecture, arts and literature in England and the different parts of Europe; while Andrew Smith in his work entitled *Gothic Literature*, has added: “In architecture the term refers to a revival . . . of a medieval aesthetic that was in vogue in Britain from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth century . . . provide a context for the emergence of Gothic as a literary mode” (2).

The Gothic is set to include English medieval poetry; however, this study will focus on the Gothic novel, which is always problematic to define. M.H Abrams in his glossary entitled *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, tries to provide a definition of the Gothic prose in regards to the first Gothic novel of Horace Walpole and his influence on the succeeding writers of the period. Abrams states:

The **Gothic novel**, or in alternative term, **Gothic romance**, is a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) . . . and flourished through the early nineteenth century. Some writers followed Walpole’s example by setting their stories in the medieval period; others set them in a Catholic country, especially Italy or Spain. The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons,

subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turned out to have natural explanations). The principal aim of such novels was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors. Many of them are now read mainly as period pieces, but best opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. (11)

Abrams notes how Walpole's work has contributed in defining and creating the Gothic genre. In addition, Abrams identifies the major characteristics of the genre most importantly the setting of the prose which is the trend the genre. Abrams further adds that the Gothic narrative usually takes place in the medieval ages in "gloomy" castles or old buildings. Furthermore, the events turn around an innocent damsel who is oppressed or terrified by a villain. Examples of early Gothic texts include: William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796).

The critical interest of Gothic did not take place until Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which is a novel based on two prefaces. The first edition is entitled *The Castle of Otranto* which is published in 1764 while the second is edited in 1765 as *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. According to Andrew Smith in his *Gothic Literature*, the first preface is about bringing the imagination of the medieval romance while: "the preface to the second edition tried to define a new mode of writing initiated by the novel." *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* is about an aristocratic family who tries to retrieve its inheritance legitimacy, which has a particular significance in the society as well as the political scene of that period because of the emergence of a "new trading middle-class" (18-22).

Abrams provides another definition in which he attempts to include and expand the Gothic to other works of “exotic setting”. He states that:

The term ‘Gothic’ has also been extended to a type of fiction which lacks the exotic setting of the earlier romances, but develops a brooding *atmosphere* of gloom and terror, represents events that are uncanny or macabre or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states.

(111)

Jerrold E. Hogle further adds to Abrams’ definitions in his “Introduction: the Gothic in western culture”. Hogle describes what the Gothic is about and its characteristics; pressing the different settings any Gothic novel may take place. In addition, Hogle identifies that the characters are hunted by a villain or mainly hidden secrets which cause the character’s physical or psychological terrors, he states that: “a Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison ... Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters...”

(2).

Michael Gamer has another point of view regarding how to define Gothic, he contends that the Gothic has evolved and it is not the same as it was known anymore; Gamer states: “as gothic no longer is what it once was, we must stop trying to define it as having a static identity” (qtd. in Burnes 8). It is needed to stop the attempts to define it as a static term with fixed identification but it is preferable if one can deal with Gothic in relation to the different temporal and spatial connotations the term may imply.

Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* is generally regarded as the first Gothic novel as Walpole suggested to “blend two types of romance” as he further referred to “the medieval chivalric romances and neoclassic tragedies” (Hogle 8). Due to the fact that the Gothic is

originated as a genre in literature, it becomes a major influential element on the followed movements mainly romanticism. Due to Welpole's second edition, the term Gothic is used to refer to all what is similar to Otranto's medieval settings, the different techniques and themes the novel had issued. Welpole's novel has contributed in the development of the genre and has influenced other writings through including the supernatural and the mysterious touch (Hogle 8).

The Gothic has long been associated with romance and romanticism and that can be explained due to the large number of the Gothic works, which are entitled in favor of romanticism. Another explanation regards the different terminologies critics have provided to the Gothic as E.J. Clery cites: "modern Romance", "the *terrible* school", "the Terrorist System of Novel Writing", "Terrorist Novel Writing", "the *hobgoblin-romance*" (qtd.in Burnes 8). However, the most appropriate explanation is the one which asserts that the Gothic has emerged as a reaction against the British Enlightenment era, which is based on the questioning of rationality and order the era claimed as it has questioned the individual's importance and the relationship between what is rational and emotional. More importantly, is that major poets and romantic writers have contributed in the Gothic evolution (Punter and Byron 13).

The Gothic narrative is not only influential to other movements but also to other writers of the time, as long as the term has been used rapidly to mark Walpole's devices which are applied in his novel. The Gothic has included a number of writers and critics who deserve to be mentioned. Ann Radcliffe is one of the major Gothic prose writers in the eighteenth century, she wrote *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1797) and her imitative work of Walpole's novel *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789). Radcliffe has mastered the Gothic elements and blended them together as well as she makes use of "violent conflicts", "abnormal situations" and "terror". Radcliff is well known

for her use of the supernatural elements since they are used in Walpole's novel as a literary technique. However, she is such skillful writer whose contributions in the development of the Gothic are of great value, and they are appreciated in the inauguration revive of the female Gothic later. Another significant figure is Clara Reeve who has made a significant contribution in the field of Gothic and especially female Gothic. She is well known for her *The Old English Baron*, another imitation to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Reeve has argued that her work came out to balance the exceeded limits of probability Walpole exaggerated (Punter and Byron 158).

The contemporary Gothic continues to develop on the light of the very first writings. The Gothic becomes more popular and has evolved and blended to other genres. Despite that they may seem contradictory in mood as the comic, and now they are inseparable from each other and one can easily detect their features in contemporary literary works for adults and children.

I.3.The Integration of the “Comic” and the “Gothic” Literature in Children’s Literature

Investigating the integration of the Gothic in children's literature devotes a careful study as the two are of distinct natures. The Gothic's partnership to the extreme conservative genre children's literature in its core principle focus on the child reader interests rather than the literature delivered. Burnes in her “The Gothic in Children's Literature: The Creation of the Adolescent in Crossover Fiction”, has added:

[The] gothic literature is rooted in a period where children were subject to greater understanding and scrutiny, and consequently, literary provision. While childhood was probably acknowledged as such before, Penny Brown observes that ‘After 1750, the recognition of the needs and interests of children of different age ranges, and a concern with supplying suitable reading material...

resulted in new initiatives on the part of publishers and authors that were to shape the development of children's literature'. (35)

Despite the fact that there were some children's books, which were restricted and recommended to meet the needs of certain age group; it was not that much a working plan to manage what the adolescents read according to their age group since not all of them respected the established set of recommendations. Similar to the act of breaking the tradition of reading school's child books, young readers have broken also the reading restrictions by reading the Gothic narrative.

The term "Gothic" remains problematic to define even when it is associated to children's literature. Roderick McGillis sees the Gothic children's literature as a set of associations of total different moods and tones. McGillis adds: "the Gothic is not, at least traditionally, a cheery genre." (qtd. in Pons 14). Nodelman agrees to such perspectives and he characterizes children's literature as "hopeful and optimistic in tone" (qtd. in Pons 15). However, their contributions are not really convincing ones, since neither the Gothic nor the child literature can be assumed to be optimistic or not, as far as, some children's works can be pessimistic and exhibits some tragic events as death, while the Gothic may celebrate happy endings (Pons 14).

McGillis and others, who have opposed such integration in children's literature, argue that such literature came out to instruct the adolescent readers and ensure the right acquisition of the fundamentals of life, whereas Gothic may signify chaos and darkness. In this regards, Burnes asserts:

There is much cross-pollination here. Perhaps the only difference between children's and adults' texts is that children's literature might conceivably feature morals new to its audience, whereas it is doubtful that any improving

messages in fiction would be unfamiliar to adult readers. This is probably the reason why some texts scarcely extended themselves in this respect (43)

Even the Gothic children's literature cannot exceed the boundaries already set by the adults. This clearly is marked as some Gothic themes and devices have been excluded and supposed to disappear in children's literature in order to preserve the childhood in contrast to the adult Gothic (Pons 17). In other words, the adults are aiming to use the Gothic in an appropriate manner so that Gothic children's literature would appropriate as Auba Llompart Pons in the work entitled "The Good Seed: Childhood and The Gothic in Children's Fiction (1990s- 2000s)" asserts, "in short, there can be monsters in children's literature as long as are the right kind of monsters" (17).

One justification to promote the hybridization of the two genres is the collaboration of the Gothic elements of terror and horror in the fairy tales while presenting the adult Gothic. Bruno Bettelheim and Marie-Louise von Franz assert that "[The] fairy tale is supposed to do for children—to provide concrete images of villains and monsters on which to project undirected anxieties and fears so that they might be contained and dispatched, to facilitate psychic integration, and to assure the child of the possibility of happy endings when present trials are overcome" (qtd. in Coats).

Always within children's literature as this paper concerns its interest with, it is often granted that literature is of serious nature especially when it comes to didacticism. But in fact it is not as such in all cases; since the purpose behind reading mainly overlap pleasure and entertainment. Another an uneasy marriage to the Gothic is the comic mode which is present to ensure such purposes. Abrams states that: "The term "comedy" is customarily applied only to plays for the stage or to motion pictures; it should be noted, however, that the comic form, so defined, also occurs in prose fiction and narrative poetry" (38). However, he further

expands his definition to include any fictional work aimed at amusing and pleasing the readers. Many writers are excited to describe how the Comic and the Gothic overlap in children's literature.

Comic Gothic literature is a new popular genre which is characterized by blending Comic and Gothic as complementary elements to each other regardless to the gap between the two moods. Dani Cavallaro states: "many dark texts are often as funny as they are scary: their mood is frequently one of the grotesque humour and jocular temerity. The comic dimension is reinforced by elements of theatricality that range from the operatic to the burlesque" (qtd. in Pons 14). Hence, such comic blending into Gothic is important to reinforce the connection with children's literature as it is regarded relevant in presenting the Gothic to the adolescents.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Gothic genre has flourished and evolved thematically and technically. Many Gothic writers have attempted to add some of the humoristic moods to avoid the extensive usage of melancholy and terror that the Gothic represents. As it is justified that humour usage aims at introducing the horror elements of the Gothic texts to address the readers' emotions most importantly fear.

According to John Morreal the comic relief is another angle to discover the world. Morreal points out that: "the ancient Greeks, Shakespeare, and other dramatists took their comedy more seriously than that. They realized that comedy is not 'time out' from the real world; rather it provides another perspective on that world. And that other perspective is no less valuable than the tragic perspective" (qtd. in Drake 12). The Comic tragic fusion has been promoted by writers as Shakespeare who has regarded Comic as an appropriate participant in such blending as it frees the readers from the extensive tragic melancholies. In addition Drake in her work entitled "The grin of the skull beneath the skin: Reassessing the Power of Comic Characters in Gothic Literature", has further added:

The fact that few critics acknowledge the role of the comic figure in the Gothic at all suggests the disconcerting power these figures have in the narratives.

Many have dismissed the comic as simple relief, as Claudia Johnson notes, or as a failure of the Gothic to achieve coherence, as argued by Napier, and/or as a failure to achieve terror, as argued by Richter. (12)

As a result, the Gothic writers are criticized due to the previous terms. Studying Ann Radcliffe's works and style, James Foster points out: "Although she admitted brief scenes of so-called comic relief, usually having to do with chattering servants, she strove to remain the rest of the time in the enchanted realms of dignity and sublimity" (qtd. in Drake 17). In contrast, the integration of Comic Gothic in literature in general whether that for adults or children is out of the need to create a balance at the level of emotions because the Comic characters are mainly "comic butts, servants and villains who are ridiculed primarily because of their social status and their superstitions" (Drake 6). Drake asserts further:

The comic butt becomes the comic agent as we move from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century. The shift in agency correlates with a shift in class status, from servants to aristocrats to middle-class intellectuals, which suggests that the comic collaborates with, rather than mocks, the cultural ideologies espoused within the Gothic which valorizes the middle-class. (18)

However, other critics of the field discuss such fusion in a different way among them is F. Dunn who argues: "who believes that 'humor as the child sees it and humor to the adult mind are not one and the same'" (qtd. in Cross). F. Dunn states that the essence of humour differs from the adults to the children. As the later being described of "no taste" as Jane Yolen believes (qtd. in Cross); what can be funny for adults cannot be regarded as such for children readers, since children may miss and skip some passages contain or contribute in comic This is also explained in terms of "maturity experiences" or due to the complexities of the

recognition of some forms of humour, which requires children to develop their cognitive abilities to grasp the sense of humour as far as they recognize irony, parody...etc.(Cross).

Among the major texts, which are addressed to adolescents as a hybrid in mood, and has blended the humorous Comic and the terrifying Gothic, is the work of the famous post modern writer Daniel Handler. Handler is best known for his master piece *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999). The novel has contributed in the development and popularity of the genre, depicting the adventures of the Baudelaire's siblings and their guardian who seeks to steal their fortune.

Chapter Two: A Series of Unfortunate Events: An Overview of *The Bad Beginning*:

Being a member of the post modern literary wave, Handler is one of the major figures the world of literature celebrates his creativity. A writer who is known for his multi-aged audiences both with his adults oriented texts and children's fiction series. Handler's (Snicket) children's series is entitled *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The series has also received high commercial success and swept with millions of copies being sold around the world since the publication of the first book in 1999. The series, of thirteen books, is addressed for both adults and youngsters, through which Handler transmits all what is it gloomy and sad, which is untraditional to the children's world, through a pinch of humour.

As Handler's series is the interest of the present study especially his first book *The Bad Beginning* (1999), the current chapter is divided into three sections as the following: Daniel Handler's biography, a brief introduction to know who the author is and his major works. The second section is about the case study's "*The Bad Beginning*" summary, discussion of the events and characters and the last section is devoted to detect the Gothic parameters in the children's literature in the novel.

II.1. Daniel Handler's Biography

He is an American author who was born in 1970 in San Francisco, the state of California. He has started writing poetry as soon as he has won the Poets Prize from the Academy of the American Poets in 1990. Later on, he has shifted his interest toward another type of fiction. Handler is best known for his variation of audiences, since he has written for both adults as well as children mainly. However his masterpiece which brought him success and fame in the world of literature and authorship in other words is his children's book which is published in 1999-2006 entitled *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

Handler also has written *The Basic Eight* (1998), *Watch Your Mouth* (2000), in addition, he has recently published his novel entitled *Why We Broke Up* (2011) which has won the Michael J. Printz Honor . Despite the number of works he has published and the success they have achieved, he is considered best known for his writing of the best selling series of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, which remains his most popular work among both the young and the adult audiences, as millions of copies are sold around the world.

Handler is best known by his pseudonym Lemony Snicket. Snicket also is the narrator of other works of Handler like: *Horseradish: Bitter Truths You Can Avoid* (2007), *The Compromiser Is Dead* (2009) and *The Dark* (2013). According to Handler, the terminology of his pen name is originated when he has written his *The Basic Eight* (1998); as he has used it as a cover name to address the Wing organization. In an interview, Todd Leopold has introduced Handler in the following way: “And behind the mysterious Snicket is one Daniel Handler, 32, a fiendishly clever author with a taste for Victorian gothic settings ...”. However, Handler throughout the series has provided ground for his readers to know who Lemony Snicket is, besides he has published another book which is devoted to Lemony Snicket himself. The book is entitled *Lemony Snicket: The Unauthorized Autobiography* which is published in May 2002; it is the fictional autobiography of the narrator of *The Series of Unfortunate Events*. Snicket, as it is cited in the first book of the series is identified by the following statement: “Lemony Snicket was born in a small town where the inhabitants were suspicious and prone to riot. He now lives in the city. During his spare time he gathers evidence and is considered something of an expert by leading authorities” (*The Bad Beginning*).

According to Lauren Turner, Lemony Snicket is not just a pen name Handler uses but rather a “pseudo persona” of Daniel Handler himself (6). He is no longer just a narrator but he is the author of the series in a way or another, as far as, he is the one behind writing the whole

story of the Baudelaire orphans. In *The Wide Window*'s biography page Snicket is described as an expert in rhetoric who seeks to search and publish the misery of the three orphaned children. Furthermore, in his letter to his publishers he declares: "Remember, you are my last hope that the tales of the Baudelaire orphans can finally be told to the general public" (*The Bad Beginning*).

The series narrated by Snicket is composed of thirteen books published as such: *The Bad Beginning* (1999), *The Reptile Room* (1999), *The Wide Window* (2000), *The Miserable Mill* (2000), *The Austere Academy* (2000), *The Ersatz Elevator* (2001), *The Vile Village* (2001), *The Hostile Hospital* (2001), *The Carnivorous Carnival* (2002), *The Slippery Slope* (2003), *The Grim Grotto* (2004), *The Penultimate Peril* (2005) And *The End* (2006). The series is turned to a movie and is released in 2004; as it is based only on the first three books.

Throughout the thirteen books of the series, the three of the Baudelaire siblings seek to retain and protect their parents' inheritance through a journey to reach security, safety and more importantly a home. Lemony Snicket recommends in the first book of the series: "If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book" (1). Such story does not welcome any readers who prefer optimistic or happy events; rather it invites readers who prefer reading books which contradicts the usual happy events and even endings. He further continues describing more the events and he adds in *The Bad Beginning* that "In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle" (1). Daniel Handler is also known as a musician who plays on the accordion. Also, he is known in the film industry as a producer and screenwriter of *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004) and the *Rick* (2003).

II.2. An Overview of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

II.2.1. Summary and Characters of *The Bad Beginning*

The very first thing comes to mind when uttering *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is the misery of the three orphaned children who escape their guardian Count Olaf. The first book of the series entitled *The Bad Beginning* is divided into 13 chapters. The story starts at the Briny Beach when the narrator introduces the readers to Violet as the eldest daughter of the Baudelaire's, she is fourteen years old. Violet also is considered as an inventor who likes skipping rocks. Later the readers are introduced to the second middle boy, he is twelve years old. Klaus is an intelligent boy who likes reading books. Finally, the youngest child is named Sunny. She speaks few words and has her own vocabulary and people face problems understanding what she is saying. Their happy days come to an end and their misfortune begins when Mr. Poe, the family banker, informs the children that their parents died in fire at their mansion as he reports: ‘ ‘Your parents,” Mr. Poe said, “have perished in a terrible fire”’ (*The Bad Beginning* 8).

The second chapter is related the Baudelaire's orphans terrible situation after their parents' death, due to such loss of their dear mother and father; they lost the home they belong to. As a result, the three children move to stay with Mr. Poe until he finds a home for them under their parents' wish; according to which the children have to stay with one of their relatives: “Mr. Poe said, “instructs that you be raised in the most convenient way possible. Here in the city, you'll be used to your surroundings, and this Count Olaf is the only relative who lives within the urban limits”” (15). However, they are unwelcomed and mistreated in the house of Mr. Poe as Mrs. Poe “purchased clothing for the orphans that was in grotesque colors, and itched” (13). Mr. Poe announces that he has found a home for the children to live in as they will live with a distant relative they never knew about who is called Count Olaf. Once the kids reach Count Olaf's home they meet his neighbor Justice Strauss who works as a

judge in the High Court. It is also at this chapter the kids meet Count Olaf and pictures his home as dirty and dark.

The third chapter is mainly about the orphans' impression toward Count Olaf; a tattooed man with villain like brow. Despite the fact that Olaf's house is a large one; the kids share the same bedroom with only one bed, and the children has taken turn in order to sleep in it. As result, the youngsters can not adopt to the situation whenever they try to act at ease. Moreover, they receive each day a list of instructions about certain jobs to be accomplished since they spend most of the day alone. One of the instructions is to prepare a dinner for Count Olaf and his troupe while they have never prepared such meals: "One morning they have read his note which tells: "My theater troupe will be coming for dinner before tonight's performance. Have dinner ready for all ten of them by the time they arrive at seven o'clock" (30). However, the intelligent youngsters ask the help of Justice Strauss to find the recipe in one of her cookbooks.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, the Baudelaire's have shopped for the ingredients and cooked the Pasta Puttanesca. Count Olaf is as usual angry at the orphans because they have not prepared roast beef, he utters that: "[...] I demand that you serve roast beef to myself and my guests" (46). The night ends when Count Olaf terrifies the kids especially the poor Klaus as he has revealed his intention behind adopting them: "You are the inheritors of an enormous fortune" (53). The three orphans do not find any solution to protect them from Count Olaf's greediness only to ask the help of Mr. Poe. After a long journey in the city to look for the bank Mr. Poe works in, Mr. Poe responds to their complain this way:

Now that you are in his care, the Count may raise you using any methods he sees fit. I'm sorry if your parents did not make you do any household chores, or if you never saw them drink any wine, or if you like their friends better

than Count Olaf's friends, but these are things that you must get used to, as Count Olaf is acting in loco parentis. Understand?" (65)

The major events of the sixth and the seventh chapters are about Mr. Poe who phones Count Olaf to inform him about the children's complaints. As a result, Count Olaf turns to be more kind and gentle to the orphans. In addition, he offers them roles in his new play entitled *The Marvelous Marriage* which is written by Al Funcoot. The plot of the play is about a man who marries a beautiful lady (supposed to be Violet) he loves as Olaf states that: "... 'You are going to play the young woman I marry'" (76), as the Count distributes the roles of the children, he insists that Violet should be the bride of the play as he plays the role of the groom.

Also, Justice Strauss is a part of the play assuming the role of the judge. However, the Baudelaire siblings do not trust Count Olaf's intentions behind his sudden and unusual kindness. At Justice Strauss' library, they read law books which may seem not interesting for kids in the Baudelaire's age but Klaus is looking for a link to discover Count Olaf's plan to control their inheritance: "'Maybe Count Olaf is trying to prove that *we're* insane, so he'd get the money,'" Violet said" (87).

While Klaus continues reading all the night in order to discover Count Olaf's plan, he comes across the following: "'The requirements are as follows: the presence of a judge, a statement of 'I do' by both the bride and the groom, and the signing of an explanatory document in the bride's own hand.'" (97). When Klaus confronts Count Olaf, he confesses his plan to him. Later, Klaus discovers that his little sister Sunny is missing. The Baudelaire siblings figure out that their sister is taken away by Count Olaf and she is put in an old tower to make Violet marry him during the play. In order to keep her promise to her dead parents, Violet wants to save her little sister whatever the matter costs. Finally, she ends up inventing a hook in order to use it in climbing the tower where Sunny is imprisoned. Unfortunately, she

fails to make her plan work and the three children, all of them, are imprisoned until the day of the play.

Because the children are forced to perform their roles; Violet says the marriage vow and signs the marriage contract. Once Violet does so, Count Olaf announces his true marriage to Violet and he is now the legitimate owner of the Baudelaire's fortune. The audience is shocked, and Violet tries to foil the marriage but the reason she provides is legally unacceptable. When Count Olaf is about to be caught he escapes threatening the poor Baudelaire's siblings to come back. By the end of the Baudelaire's story, they return to live with Mr. Poe until he will find a new relative of them. Concerning Justice Strauss who has been shocked, she proposes to the Baudelaire siblings to stay with her, however, Mr. Poe refuses because of their parents' wish: "The car drove farther and farther away, until Justice Strauss was merely a speck in the darkness, and it seemed to the children that they were moving in an aberrant..." (145).

II.2.2. The Novel's Characterization

The character's construction in the novel is based on the collectiveness of the Baudelaire family. The Baudelaire family members are there to protect and save each other especially Violet (Pons 323). However, Violet may express some forms of individuality when she is thinking about a solution or an invention as she often works in secret. Most importantly, they are complementary to each other and this fact strengthens their power to confront their misfortune events (Pons 323-6). In some cases, Violet's invention may work and help them to overcome a difficulty, sometimes; it is Klaus' books and other times thanks to Sunny's teeth: "... 'I've been up all night,' he said, 'reading this book.' He put the book out on the table so Olaf could see it. 'It's called Nuptial Law,' Klaus said, 'and I learned many interesting things while reading it' " (*The Bad Beginning* 96). Also, reading books helped Klaus to reveal Count Olaf's plan:

“You’re going to marry my sister to gain control of the Baudelaire fortune! Or at least, that’s what you planned to do. But when I show this information to Mr. Poe, your play will not be performed, and you will go to jail!”” (*The Bad Beginning* 98)

Violet Baudelaire is the eldest daughter, she is fourteen years old. What can be said about violet is that she is a right handed girl who likes skipping rocks. Also, she is intelligent and of deep thinking and inventor as she invents unusual tools. Before her parents’ death, she has worked on building a device which retrieves rocks which are skipped in the ocean. Violet becomes responsible for her brother and sister after her parents’ death. Also, she is a symbol of sacrifice when she accepts to marry Count Olaf in order to save her sister Sunny and to keep her promise to her parents. Violet is the most clever and courageous one of her siblings especially when she waits for the right moment to spoil Count Olaf’s fake marriage and tries to manipulate the announcement into her own advantage as she explains:

“What did you say, Countess?” Olaf said. “I’m *not* your countess,” Violet said testily, a word which here means “in an extremely annoyed tone.” “At least, I don’t *think* I am.” “And why is that?” Count Olaf said. “I did not sign the document in my own hand, as the law states,” Violet said. “What do you mean? We all saw you!” Count Olaf’s eyebrow was beginning to rise. (*The Bad Beginning* 150)

Klaus Baudelaire is the middle boy of the Baudelaires. He is twelve years old. He likes reading books and has specific diversion toward reading books: “Back when his parents were alive, Klaus is used to take a flashlight to bed with him and hide under the covers, reading until he couldn’t keep his eyes open” (*The Bad Beginning* 93). Klaus is the one who figures out the plan of Count Olaf behind his play *The Marvelous Marriage* to control their fortune: “

‘Where did you get that book?’ ‘From Justice Strauss’s library,’ Klaus said. ‘But that’s not important. What’s important is that I have found out your plan’ ” (*The Bad Beginning* 96).

Sunny Baudelaire is the youngest girl of the family. According to Snicket’s representation of her character; she is seemingly a linguist who has her own words and language other people cannot understand: “For instance, this morning she was saying “Gack!” over and over, which probably meant, “Look at that mysterious figure emerging from the fog!”” (*The Bad Beginning* 4). She is kidnapped by Count Olaf in order to oblige Violet to accept his conditions and marries him at the play. However, she is a protagonist character yet in the first book of the series she has a shy presence and little or nothing is worthy to be mentioned about her in comparison to the other twelve remaining books of Snicket’s series.

Count Olaf is the villain of the story. He is presented in the novel as a distant relative to the Baudelaire family whom they never met or heard of before: “ ‘If he lives in the city,” Violet said, “why didn’t our parents ever invite him over?’ ” (*The Bad Beginning* 15). Snicket introduces Count Olaf as a tall tattooed man, very skinny and “dressed in gray suit that had many dark stains on it” (*The Bad Beginning* 22). Count Olaf has only one eyebrow with very shiny eyes “which made him look both hungry and angry” (*The Bad Beginning* 22).

Justice Strauss is the neighbor of Count Olaf and the first person the children have met in the neighborhood. She works as a judge at the High Court and as a result she is titled Justice. She is unmarried and has no children; however, she has a large library which contains any book needed. The Baudelaire siblings have liked her library and made use of it when they have asked to prepare the dinner meal and most importantly it is only because of Justice Strauss’ library the orphans are able to spoil Count Olaf’s secret plan behind the play.

Other characters include: Mr. Poe, who, is the family banker and friend. He works at the Mulctuary Money Management. Mr. Poe is the responsible for the children until he finds for them a home of one of their relatives as their parents wish (6). Furthermore, the members

of Count Olaf's theater troupe are characters of all shapes and sizes: a bald man with a very long nose who wears a black robe, two women their faces full of powder, another man with skinny arms and finally, a fat man whose gender is not distinguishable (47).

Besides to the characters, other elements have been involved in the novel building. As a result it becomes indistinguishably Gothic. These elements have varied between the tone, the setting and the different characterizations in which the next section is concerned with.

II.3. The Gothic Parameters in *The Bad Beginning*

From the ancient to the modern history, the Gothic's variation of creativity and characterization of the events are of great matter for many writers thus literary texts. *The Bad Beginning* is not an exception, since it portrays a post modern Gothic vision blended with the Comic and humoristic features. These features are used accordingly to convince and transmit to the readers the author's message behind the text in a way of didactic nature by teaching the youngsters the life morals and also adults of the adventures, heroism, suspense and villainy. Moreover, the series is characterized by its use of both what is terrifying and funny in the examination of the events and characters throughout the thirteen books starting with the first one.

Embodied in the adventure of the Baudelaire orphans to protect their parents' inheritance, the Gothic devices are applied in a skillful manner as Handler is famous by. The series is regarded by many critics of the field as dark and it is termed as "dark comedy", "fantasy, horror, quirky" and "mock Gothic" (Pons 269). Despite the different terminologies which are given to Handler's Gothic style, classifying the series fiction and the genre which is complicated matter for some figures of the field as Pons who discussed this notion in relation to post modernity.

Pons classifies Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* in different manner which opposes the traditional outset categories. Pons explains: "Not only does *A Series of Unfortunate Events* fall under the paradigms of children's fiction; Gothic fiction and comic Gothic; it is also a postmodernist text in form and content" (273), in addition, he identifies the series being "Gothic –Postmodernism" (273). Maria Beville, in her work entitled *Gothic- Post Modernism: Voicing the Terrors of Post Modernity*, defines Gothic –Postmodernism stating it is: "a hybrid made that emerges from the dialogic interaction of Gothic and postmodern characteristics in a given text" (qtd. in Pons 273). In other words the term "Gothic-postmodernism" refers to any fictional work that combines both the Gothic and postmodern criteria. Pons further explains that these Gothic elements are tools which depicts the terrifying truth of all what is it post modern to children and adults (273).

Dani Cavallaro regards Gothic fiction as a dark narration of events, that is inspired by the early existing Gothic texts which are regarded as the classics of the genre (qtd.in Pons 314). Snicket represents such classical narrations in his own way as far as he investigates the Baudelaire's adventures and documents them to voice their misery and bad luck. However, Cavallaro provides a useful definition for this section of study as he further suggests that "the representational field where the interaction of terror and horror is most patent is that of Gothic" (qtd. in Pons 17). In addition to Cavallaro, Hogle is one of the figures who distinguishes between "Gothic Terror" and "Gothic Horror" in their works.

According to Hogle who notes the difference between what is identified as "Gothic of terror and of horror":

This oscillation can range across a continuum between what have come to be called the "terror Gothic" on the one hand and the "horror Gothic" on the

other. The first of these holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past, while the latter confronts the principal characters with the gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences. (Hogle 3)

In other words, in any Gothic narrative which is based on terror, terror is the result of past secrets which hunt the characters at a given situation. However, Gothic of horror involves abnormal “everyday life” situations leading toward physical and even psychological violence.

There are some criteria which define the Gothic novel more importantly in relation to the present study's *The Bad Beginning*. According to Hogle: “This pattern of hyperbolically verbalizing contradictory fears and desires over a possible ‘base’ of chaos and death, and in a blatantly fictional style, remains a consistent element in the Gothic...” (5), accordingly elements of death, fears and violence are regarded as constant elements of the Gothic fiction based on a comparison of the classical Gothic narrations. The fact of projecting these elements on the studied novel of the present study is highly required in order to identify it as Gothic.

Starting by the unfortunate death of the three Baudelaire's parents at their mansion in a fire, it will become a subject of investigation in the upcoming 12 books in relation to Count Olaf's villainy and the secret organization of V.F.D: “ ‘Your parents,’ Mr. Poe said, ‘have perished in a terrible fire?’ The children didn't say anything. ‘They perished,’ Mr. Poe said, ‘in a fire that destroyed the entire house. I'm very, very sorry to tell you this, my dears’ ” (*The Bad Beginning* 8). In an interview with Gross, Handler has justified his choice of such unhappy beginning by his desire to write about terrible events because these events have a “long tradition in literature” as death is a part of them.

The novel takes place at an unnamed city which is described by Snicket as a “dirty and busy city” (*The Bad Beginning* 2), and at Count Olaf’s house where the children live, the building is described as: “The bricks were stained with soot and grime” (*The Bad Beginning* 20). He further adds: “The entire building sagged to the side, like a crooked tooth. There were only two small windows, which were closed with the shades drawn even though it was a nice day. Rising above the windows was a tall and dirty tower that tilted slightly to the left” (*The Bad Beginning* 21). In addition to the place where the story takes place, the weather also has a share as it is presented within the story especially at the very beginning at the Briny Beach as “gray and cloudy” (*The Bad Beginning* 2).

Another preferred Gothic device which is used by the Gothic writers and owes appreciation is when the protagonist or other characters are kidnapped or trapped in a dark hidden place. The Baudelaire’s youngest daughter Sunny went missing for a while, before the children discover that she has been trapped by Count Olaf’s tower. Olaf points out: “ ‘Yes,’ Count Olaf continued, “it certainly is strange to find a child missing. And one so small, and helpless’ ” (*The Bad Beginning* 103). Also, Snicket further adds that violet “... pictured Sunny toppling from the tower and onto the ground, pictured her sister’s last thoughts being ones of sheer terror” (*The Bad Beginning* 107) .

Following another feature Handler applies in the story is the use of mystery as a Gothic element. One may consider the whole series to be based on this feature of mystery as the children are hunted by the search for the cause behind their parents’ death in relation to Count Olaf and the secret organization of the V.F.D. In addition, in *The Bad Beginning*, the Baudelaire siblings are curious to know the secret behind the eye they have found everywhere at Count Olaf’s home. The fact that children at the age of the Baudelaire orphans are supposed to be watched by their parents; in the present study the relative are the ones responsible of them, yet the Baudelaires are embarking in a mysterious journey to solve their parents’ death:

“Count Olaf had an image of an eye tattooed on his ankle, matching the eye on his front door. They wondered how many other eyes were in Count Olaf’s house, and whether, for the rest of their lives...” (*The Bad Beginning* 25).

Isolation of the protagonist(s) is another element of the Gothic narration. In Snicket’s *The Bad Beginning*, the children do not know a lot of people only those who have met at dinner parties they have attended with their parents. Even they have relatives they never heard about: “Violet said, ‘why didn’t our parents ever invite him over?’ ” (*The Bad Beginning* 15). Also at Count Olaf’s home, they spent most of the time alone: “When the children woke up and chose their clothing out of the refrigerator box, they would walk into the kitchen and find a list of instructions left for them by Count Olaf, who would often not appear until nighttime” (*The Bad Beginning* 30).

Terror is a major element Snicket uses to introduce the poor Baudelaire siblings’ unfortunate events. It is highly traced in the flow of events; the children start their journey looking for a home. The terror starts with the death of their parents as they are left alone in a difficult psychological situation: “It is useless for me to describe to you how terrible Violet, Klaus, and even Sunny felt in the time that followed. If you have ever lost someone very important to you, then you already know how it feels, and if you haven’t, you cannot possibly imagine it” (*The Bad Beginning* 11)

Following their loss, the children move to live with their relative Count Olaf. Count Olaf is the symbol of villainy and the antagonist of the story, who seeks to control their fortune. An example of the terror which is experienced by the children can be found as the children are under the care of Count Olaf: “Count Olaf’s face grew very red. For a moment he said nothing. Then, in one sudden movement, he reached down and struck Klaus across the face” (53). In addition, Sunny too has been a victim of his greediness as Snicket expresses that: “With an inhuman roar he picked her up in one scraggly hand and raised her so she was

staring at him in the eye”(46), and finally Violet is victimized by the depressed marriage and threat of Count Olaf toward her brother and little sister.

In children’s literature even if it is not a Gothic work, the villain’s presence is a necessity. Since the child hero or the protagonist and even the plot of the story is built upon the child rejection to the villain’s tyranny. Count Olaf and his oppressive authority and greediness have contributed in the children’s self development in a way or another. Mainly the Gothic narrative’s protagonist is a female who is victimized by a male. Nikolajeva argues in relation to this point: “in children’s fiction, girls are doubly oppressed: as women and as children” (qtd. in Pons 236). The protagonist is courageous passionate and powerful. While the female protagonist (Violet), the Gothic heroine, is involved in a depressed marriage which overlaps terrors in the home of Count Olaf who has enslaved her and her young siblings. Sunny also has suffered Count Olaf’s tyranny in different occasions: “Count Olaf looked down at Sunny, who had spoken so suddenly. With an inhuman roar he picked her up in one scraggly hand and raised her so she was staring at him in the eye. Needless to say, Sunny was very frightened and began crying immediately, too scared to even try to bite the hand that held her” (*The Bad Beginning* 46).

Unlike the other children of their age in other literary works, Snicket has another vision toward the Baudelaire orphans’ representation. Violet, Klaus and Sunny are portrayed by Snicket as courageous and independent characters and mature unlike their peers. Because children are supposed to be observed and saved by their parents or the adults in general, the orphans since the death of their parents have worked to save and to take care of each other throughout the course of the events (Pons 296-7).

Another trait of the Gothic literature is the unreliable narrator. While the narrator is supposed to identify which point of view the story being told and to which degree the readers trust him; Snicket makes it clear from the very beginning what and why he is telling such

story. Snicket is the writer, the narrator and finally a character within the story as he decides to trace the Baudelaire's misfortune adventures and write them down preferring not to involve directly in making the events. He states that:

This is not a tale of Lemony Snicket. It is useless to tell the Snicket story, because it happened so very long ago, and because there is nothing anybody can do about the way it has turned out, so the only reason I could possibly have for jotting it down in the margins of these pages would be to make this book even more unpleasant, unnerving, and unbelievable than it already is. This is a story about Violet, Klaus and Sunny Baudelaire. (*The Hostile Hospital* 89)

Handler's *The Bad Beginning*, is the first book of other thirteen books, which depict the miseries of the Baudelaire children. As the chapter investigates the characters and the Gothic presence in the first novel, the present study also marks the presence of the Comic features which are blended along with the Gothic ones.

Chapter Three: Lemony Snicket's Comic-Gothic Work and its Representation in the World of Children's Literature

In the last twenty years, writers in the field of Children's Literature have shaped their writings which are delivered to the young readers. As their works have been presented in a dress of dark melancholy sewed with a humorous design. Lemony Snicket has provided one of the most successful Gothic works of the 21st century. Handler's works which are addressed to children have broken some of the past conventions that define the traditional Gothic.

The first section of the third chapter will shed light on the incorporation of Gothic and Comic as contradictory moods in the world of children. Furthermore, the section is aimed at discussing the extent to which Handler has succeeded in achieving such incorporation in the most appropriate way and in relying it to his readers through his words, characters and flow of events. The second section will focus on the impact of blending the frightening and the funny in one work on the child reader, and will attempt to answer the following questions: how can children benefit and learn from the Baudelaire's misery? And more importantly, do they benefit and develop any cognitive ability after they have ended up reading such a work? Finally, on what basis will readers decode the Comic Gothic messages of the text according to the writer's intention?

III.1. *The Bad Beginning*: Comic-Gothic Incorporation in Children's Literature

Children have received little or no attention at all in literature especially at the very first attempts to reach an audience, at a time when children read the didactic oriented books or some of the adults' literature for pleasure. However, with the development of children's literature many of children's texts have been read even by adults not as a way of supervision but for the pleasure and the entertainment the work may cover through hundreds of words and pages. Through the publication of the unfortunate series, Handler has contributed in

improving and developing children's literature as a genre at different levels. A motivated aspect which has driven many writers to shift their attentions toward children is its fertile nature and being applicable for any experimentation especially that of the Comic-Gothic fusion.

A Series of Unfortunate Events is a child oriented work, which is classified as a Gothic fiction and consists of 13 volumes filled with adventure, secrets, young heroes, murders and misery blended with humour. The work is the result of merging the funny of the Comic with the frightening melancholy and ambiguities of the Gothic. Speaking about the series, it has been mentioned or cited as a support for other works briefly in critical studies conducted in the fields of Gothic and children's literature, despite the fact that it is rich of the Gothic themes and parameters. Similarly to Handler's case, Julie Cross has issued Henrietta Branford's work *Dimanche Diller* to provide ground for the study of the sophistications of humour in the Comic Gothic text dedicated to children (2). However, through the series' chapters, one may detect the Gothic building of the novel along with the Comic parody or any form of humour. At this stage it is possible to analyze and set out the Gothic body parts.

According to Danel Olsen, who has valued Handler's work as being untraditional, adventurous and miserable, the series is ought to be the result of the Comic-Gothic fusion. As an attempt from Handler to revive the Gothic traditional standards, truths and characteristics in a book of thirteen volumes, he reshapes the Gothic in a Comic frame work. The heroes of the series still children, yet it has been read by both youngsters and adults because of its unexpected and surprising events. The series is full of misery and misfortune but readers still have to laugh. In this regard, Olson states:

Composing these books at the turn of the century, just when such uneasy and ominous books about the past and the future tend to bloom, he has created a series that continues to surprise us, to stay unclassifiable (Is this for adults? Is it

for kids?), to evenly split critics on its literary value, to astound all with adrenaline-addled adventures in alliteration, to offer satirical commentary on innumerable follies, and to make us shudder as we laugh. (507)

Handler's series is considered one of the best literary examples which have blended Gothic and Comic as it depicts the misery of the three orphans. In addition, the work has added to the genre and contributed in its development and the spread of its popularity through a whole thirteen adventurous books (Cross). Handler's works have been characterized by what Brett Holquist and others have called "the complexities and sophistications of dark-humour texts" (3). However, Cross has added that the Comic-Gothic works' sophistications lie within the readers themselves and their understandings of the complex and different forms of the humorous conventions, parodies ...etc. Handler's work is a fertile text which has provided ground for the study of the sophistications of humour in the Comic Gothic text dedicated to children. Thus, the work is a good example which illustrates such complexities of humour (3).

The process of the villain's construction in Handler's Gothic series is perfectly achieved, as he has created a monstrous villain who is driven by his greediness whom the readers will not like or tolerate. Count Olaf is described throughout the novel as the one who seeks to be aware of the locations of his target that are the Baudelaire children and their fortune. According to Vladimir Propp, schemes of the villain character in the Gothic text is known as "reconnaissance" (qtd.in Olson 516-7). According to Propp in his work entitled "Morphology of the Folk Tale", reconnaissance is defined as: "1. The reconnaissance has the aim of finding out the location of children, or sometimes of precious objects, etc ... 2. An inverted form of reconnaissance is evidenced when the intended victim questions the villain ... 3. In separate instances one encounters forms of reconnaissance by means of other personages" (28). In addition, Count Olaf is the type of character who prefers misleading the

other characters in order to give up their belongings he wishes to own. He has adopted several disguises to conceal his true identity in order to execute several of his evil plans; he disguised himself as a snake man, Captain Sham and even as a pregnant woman, the fact that projects another scheme of Propp which is “trickery” (29). Propp defines it in terms of: “The villain, first of all, assumes a disguise. ... Then follows the function itself” (29).

Count Olaf’s villainous character has no limits to stop at, but even worse he has tended to kidnap and commit murders against other characters; only to get what he wishes “the Baudelaire’s fortune”. An ultimate villain is what Count Olaf is about, he did not think twice to kidnap and dangle the poor baby Sunny from the top of the old tower. When Sunny went missing, Violet and Klaus looked everywhere until the shameless Count Olaf has pointed to where he has been hiding her:

She [Violet] followed his gesture and found herself looking at the forbidden tower. It was made of dirty stone, with only one lone window, and just barely visible in the window was what looked like a birdcage. “Oh no,” Klaus said in a small, scared voice, and Violet looked again. It was a birdcage, dangling from the tower window like a flag in the wind, but inside the birdcage she could see a small and frightened Sunny. (*The Bad Beginning* 105)

Olaf’s persona has started to diminish mainly in the last four volumes of the novel as Olson has stated. Despite the fact that he has been looking for the Baudelaire’s wealth, Count Olaf is seen to be the character that mostly has paid attention to the orphan trio (517). This is somehow contradictory, yet it remains what shapes the Gothic paradox and even one may consider Olaf in Handler’s series to be the wicked father of the children because of his greediness and his vision toward them as a tool to reach their wealth (Pons 287).

Speaking about the child characterization in the series, the three Baudelaires are depicted as the victims of the terrible events, Snicket states: “Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire were intelligent children, and they were charming, and resourceful, and had pleasant facial features, but they were extremely unlucky, and most everything that happened to them was rife with misfortune, misery, and despair” (*The Bad Beginning* 1). All in all one concludes that, the Baudelaires are projected in Snicket’s story according to his feelings and emotions the same way he has talked about his dearest Beatrice, the children’s mother (Pons 285).

Children’s characterization in the series is no longer passive, traditional, weak and immature. From the very first introduction to the kids, the readers have received Violet, Klaus of twelve and fourteen years old and the baby girl Sunny being untraditionally independent and mature to take responsibility of their own; as the adult characters who are supposed to take care of them ended up dead. They are also portrayed as talented; each one with a particular hobby or ability. Like Violet who has been introduced as a talented inventor of an effective tools:

Eventually, using enough of the ugly clothing, Violet had a rope that was, she hoped, just over thirty feet long. She tied one end of it to the metal spider, and looked at her handiwork. What she had made was called a grappling hook, which is something used for climbing up the sides of buildings, usually for a nefarious purpose. (*The Bad Beginning* 118)

This characterization has been apparently clear in the adults’ treatment toward the Baudelaire trio; at the very first pages of the series as they are treated equally as mature young adults who have attended the adults’ dinner parties with their parents:

One of the things Violet, Klaus, and Sunny really liked about their parents was that they didn’t send their children away when they

had company over, but allowed them to join the adults at the dinner table and participate in the conversation as long as they helped clear the table. (*The Bad Beginning* 6)

Thus, Snicket represents the three orphans as intelligent and morally mature enough which has made Count Olaf who has underestimated them seems ridiculous and stupid (Pons 297).

While Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn in their work entitled *Children's Fantasy Literature* have explained Snicket's protagonists with a wide vision, they state:

Violet and Klaus, the protagonists of Lemony Snicket's absurdist Gothic books *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (beginning with *The Bad Beginning*, 1999), are never less than alert to the world in which they live; they may have much to learn as they are travel but they are continuously curious and determined to get below the surface of things in a way that was once uncommon in Gothic fiction. (176)

In *The Bad Beginning*, Count Olaf is the most terrible villain throughout the novel. He has been portrayed as a cruel man who hates the children and he may commit any thing only in order to get what he wishes. Throughout the novel, it has been voiced that there is no hope for Olaf to be a good person. However, it is somehow contradicting again once he has saved Snicket's sister in the upcoming volumes of the series. The man who has committed murders and he is the same man who has saved the pregnant woman as Olaf states that: "I'll get my hands on your fortune if it's the last thing I do," the voice hissed. "And when I have it, I'll kill you and your siblings with my own two hands" (*The Bad Beginning* 158). Another example, when Olaf has kidnapped the little baby Sunny and dangled her in a cage at the top of a tower:

"Well, now," Count Olaf said, sitting on a stump. "If you really want me to let her go, I will. But surely even a stupid brat like you might realize that if I let

her go—or, more accurately, if I ask my comrade to let her go—poor little Sunny might not survive the fall down to the ground. That's a thirty-foot tower, which is a very long way for a very little person to fall, even when she's inside a cage. But if you insist—"No!" Klaus cried. "Don't!". (*The Bad Beginning* 105-6)

As a result, this leads the readers to raise a lot of questions about the nature of Count Olaf's evil and whether he is born as a bad guy, in other words; is villainy innate in the human beings. Such a question can be answered through the Baudelaire children's maturity, adventures and morals evolution. At first, the Baudelaire orphans are described as unified and of enough morals to be good children model: "Goodness," Justice Strauss said. "Cooking dinner for an entire theater troupe seems like a lot to ask of children." "Count Olaf gives us a lot of responsibility," Violet said. What she wanted to say was, "Count Olaf is an evil man," but she was well mannered" (*The Bad Beginning* 36-7).

Even though the children have a set of morals which have differentiated them from the villain Olaf as just they have been victimized. The idealized version of the relationship between the adults and children in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is totally absent, with an exception for the Baudelaires' parents and Count Olaf's neighbor Justice Strauss. The other characters in the novel either have been villainous as the cruel, greedy Count Olaf or disappointing and incapable to handle their responsibility as Mr. Poe. In Snicket's series, Violet, Klaus and Sunny are no longer a representation of innocence and childhood but, rather they do experience the life and exercise maturity at early ages (Pons 299), Pons adds: "Moreover, Snicket's series is actually quite "anti-child" ... because it does not praise innocence and childlikeness, but experience and maturity"(300).

The series does not only break with the romantic vision of the child and childhood, but also it breaks with the idealized vision of children's happiness. Snicket contradicts any traditional existing sense of happiness from the very first pages of his work as he warns:

I'm sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant. It tells an unhappy tale about three very unlucky children. Even though they are charming and clever, the Baudelaire siblings lead lives filled with misery and woe. (*The Bad Beginning*)

The Baudelaires are set up to grow up in a different version of adulthood and thus, happiness may appear inappropriate in such context. However, Snicket shows his children characters as uncomfortable either with their mysterious future: "the Baudelaire children looked at one another, but with their future such a mystery they could think of nothing to say" (*The Bad Beginning* 17), or worried from Count Olaf about their fortune (Pons 312).

The orphans are always struggling with their relative guardian Count Olaf, thus it has become easy to trace the Comic under the Gothic especially in regards to the villain. According to Cross, the villain may appear ridiculous in some situations as a result the child reader may find a space to revenge and combat him. Cross has further added: "This form of aggressive superiority humour can serve as a time out for children, who, through such humorous literature, can be free from the constraints of society for a time". Count Olaf appears in some places in the novel as a comic figure. Olaf has been introduced as: "He was very tall and very thin, dressed in a gray suit that had many dark stains on it. His face was unshaven, and rather than two eyebrows, like most human beings have, he had just one long one" (*The Bad Beginning* 22). Another example of how this comic portrayal of the villain is stressed in the novel: "the orphans looked down, and saw that although Count Olaf was wearing shoes, he wasn't wearing any socks" (*The Bad Beginning* 25).

Cross has identified the grotesque caricatures as a mean of humour. The grotesque caricatures are of great importance for the success of the two moods blending while they are used as a tool to reduce the Gothic tension through the comic forms. According to which all what is cruel may appear ridiculous and Snicket has made it clear through the character of Count Olaf, for example he states: “ ‘Aren’t raspberries delicious?’” he asked. “They were my favorite berries when I was your age.” Violet tried to picture Count Olaf as a youngster, but couldn’t. His shiny eyes, bony hands, and shadowy smile all seemed to be things only adults possess” (*The Bad Beginning* 72).

However, in *The Bad Beginning* the Comic humorous forms are not always simple; readers by time will discover more ridiculous characters that have been introduced as villainous but at the same time appear silly. The members of the troop theatre of Count Olaf are represented as characters of all shapes and sizes; a bald man with a very long nose, two women their faces full of powder, a man of skinny arms and a fat man whose gender is not distinguishable. The fear from Count Olaf villainous character soon diminishes once Klaus discovers his poor use of words and thus his stupidity becomes apparent especially when he has used the word “standoffish” out of its place: “Klaus knew the word “standoffish” and almost laughed out loud at Olaf’s incorrect use of it. But his face still had a bruise on it, so Klaus remained silent” (*The Bad Beginning* 75).

Similar to the classic Gothic’s grotesque villain; Snicket’s antagonist Count Olaf is portrayed being cruel, wicked guardian who has the desire to take control over the wealth of the orphans: the Baudelaires, as a result it creates what is known in the Comic-Gothic literature by the child-hater character. After their parents have passed away, the three orphans are hunted by their relative Count Olaf who declares his desire to own the ‘audelaire’s fortune, as he states in the first book that: “ ‘You are the inheritors of an enormous fortune’ ” (53). Due to his greedy intentions, Olaf reappears in front of the children

whenever they are about to meet a new guardian. Olsen comments on Olaf's role in the life of the orphans as he remarks:

For readers not yet aware, the novels concern the three Baudelaire children—oldest sister Violet, middle brother Klaus, and baby Sunny—who are orphaned by page eight in the series' starting point... their distant relative and first guardian, Count Olaf. It is Olaf whose lousy disguises and scheming presence haunt each fresh start the orphans make. His declared motive, consistently held even by the final volume when he is lost at sea, is to swindle the orphans so that "the Baudelaire fortune is mine. Finally, I [will be] a wealthy man, so everyone must do what I say. (Olson 507)

Similar to Handler's work, Cross has examined Branford's *Dimanche Diller* which is a work that makes use of the humour of incongruity and also applicable to Snicket's series. Like Wolfie, Count Olaf is described as the villain, cruel guardian who soon has turned to appear silly and ridiculous. Continuing always with the unexpected, no one who has read the three or four first volumes of the novel can ever imagine a killer like Count Olaf will rescue Snicket's pregnant sister without any personal benefit (Olson 519).

A dramatic irony is what can describe Handler's series as his Gothic villain construction has contributed in the creation of a monster who will by the end abandon his villainy somehow. A work through which the Baudelaires will suffer the most because of their parents' unfortunate death due to a fire at their mansion, to be hunted by their distant relative Count Olaf whom they never heard about. And soon, Count Olaf will hunt them each time they get a new start with a new guardian. Even the character of Mr. Poe can be considered as ironic since he is the family friend and banker and is supposed to be responsible for ensuring the children's safety with their guardian. However, he is portrayed being busy and does not

listen to the children's complain carefully: "Now, I hate to usher you out posthaste, but I have very much work to do." The children just sat there, stunned. Mr. Poe looked up, and cleared his throat. "'Posthaste,'" he said, "means—" "—means you'll do nothing to help us," Violet finished for him" (*The Bad Beginning* 67).

III.2. The Role of Comic-Gothic Children's Literature

As being a unit of the social construction, which is composed of the parent's and their children, the family is an essential element in children's literature. However, orphans and orphanage has the same vitality and importance. The children heroes and heroines are the popular trend of children's literature especially that of the nineteenth and twentieth century. According Melanie Kimball in her work entitled "From Folktales to Fiction: Orphan Characters in Children's Literature", orphanage represents isolation from the society, which connects the child with unexcited outdoor world. However, it is the adults' duty to offer the orphans protection and safety; this is more explained by Kimball who has regarded orphaned children as:

They do not belong to even the most basic of groups, the family unit, and in some cultures this is enough to cut them off from society at large. In other cultures, orphans are regarded as special people who must be protected and cared for at all costs. In either case, orphans are clearly marked as being different from the rest of society. They are the eternal Other. (559)

In addition, Kimball in her work has established the essential elements which are typical to the orphan narrative thus the children narrative in general. The first element is about the presence of the guardian or the helper to assist the child orphan (562); in Handler's first book which is set to be Gothic, the guardian Count Olaf is the bad guy who hunts the Baudelaires. However, Justice Strauss may be considered as the ideal guardian to the youngsters and offered them help. The second element is about the mistreatment (562). Like

the majority of orphans in *The Bad Beginning*, the Baudelaires are not an exception who are mistreated and abused either verbally: “ ‘Orphans?’” Count Olaf called out in his scratchy voice” (45), or physically: “...he reached down and struck Klaus across the face. Klaus fell to the floor, his face inches from the eye tattooed on Olaf’s ankle” (53). Other elements include the quest, obstacles and reward where the orphan is rewarded for his strength in overcoming the different obstacles he faced throughout the story (565-6). Mattix argues that orphan characters are important in literature because: “This strand of orphan story reinforced the image of the inherently good and pure nature of childhood, and focused on the power of orphans to redeem and rejuvenate adults who had lost the joy and happiness of their own youth”. (20)

It is assumed that literature is one of the most important medium of discovering the external world for the adults as well as children. For the sake of developing children’s knowledge, humour becomes a need the literature has to cover in order to guide the young readers to overcome some difficulties they may encounter in the Gothic texts. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnick are among others who have dealt with this issue as different studies have been set out to explain how humour can contribute in “the child” development. “A relief of the fearful aspects” is how Horner and Zlosnik regard humour in the Gothic context which is translated through a “hysterical laughter” (qtd.in Cross). Better known consideration of such laughter according of the Relief Theory, as such laughter is the result the repressed energy of emotions and the individual anxieties (Cross).

While a number of studies have revealed the importance of the comic mood in the Gothic literature mainly the one addressed to children, they also advocate a central aspect for their behaving and cognitive developmental process. As a result, The humorous aspects of the genre have to do ultimately with the young readers’ developmental emotional and cognitive stage, the incorporation of humour within the dark horror texts is aimed in the first place at

investigating and reaching the child deepest unspoken fears and unexpressed feelings. In other words, such literature can offer a hero character that can represent the children readers themselves' fears and anxieties that they may live; especially orphanage thus loneliness as the present study is concerned with. By the end or at specific point, the character can overcome his weaknesses and fears, while he transmits a message of security as his troubles get resolves and things get back to normal (Cross).

The Comic Gothic literature is not always about the psychological and the cognitive development, but also is of educational orientation as well. As many Comic Gothic texts advocate teaching young readers through ameliorating their learning skills especially reading and writing. In addition, such literature can enrich their vocabulary storage. As Lemony Snicket who plays with the language he uses; by setting out definitions for words which seem difficult, weird and new for his young readers: "The car drove farther and farther away, until Justice Strauss was merely a speck in the darkness, and it seemed to the children that they were moving in an aberrant— the word "aberrant" here means "very, very wrong, and causing much grief"—direction" (*The Bad Beginning* 162).

In addition, Snicket's work has to represent the parody existence in his works and makes it funny to learn while they entertain themselves.

In an interview with Terry Gross, Handler has justified his use of the difficult words and their definitions using "... a word which here means ..." because he loves such words and just wants to include them in his book, not out of any pedagogical intentions. However, he states that it is exciting to provide such precious words for many readers who do not know them in order to understand the dramatic irony he expresses in his work

The novel has offered the best models for children personified in the Baudelaire orphans as beings inventors like Violet and good readers like Klaus. As in the first book, Count Olaf's plan has been detected because Klaus has read law books and has figured out

Olaf's plan behind the play. Another example can be used in such case is when the orphans have to prepare the meal for Olaf and his theatre members using Justice Strauss' cook book. Thus, the novel encourages youngsters to read books for knowledge they may later turn to find a solution that saves their lives. In this regard Katharine Slater in her work entitled: "“I think these chapters are not real”: *In a Dark, Dark Room* and the Horrors of Early Reading" states: "The act of learning to read is therefore framed through this line of books as an act of independent control, a process that requires the child to distance herself from adult guidance and develop a monogamous relationship with a text, thereby legitimizing her ability to decode and synthesize language" (116). To sum up, the presence of the Comic in literature has a vital role being a cultural and educational element for achieving the literary pleasure and entertainment. However, in the Gothic context, it has to do with the reduction of all the fearful, dark, and terrified elements found in Gothic narratives.

While children readers enjoy resolving all what is it challenging, they do prefer forms of humour which seem challenging; forms which seem new and difficult to understand. However, they face some difficulties of understanding the complex forms as irony and parody. In order to overcome such difficulties which hinder understanding, young readers has to appreciate and concentrate on the most effective reading when they actually start to read between the lines as Cross states: "Comments upon the types of irony will be made throughout the letter, and it must be remembered that irony as a concept gets its effects from below the surface, saying much more than it seems to be saying ... so that readers need to be able to recognize the contrasts between the literal meaning and an implied unspoken meaning". In other words, forms of irony and parody which will be revealed easily since they play a vital role as components in the literary humour as long as readers want to know more than the surface intention of events, characters and the prominent events form the Comic-Gothic texts for children.

The use of slapstick or any element of humour which may contain any violence is considered as subversive. In other words, through the different humorous forms which ridicule the villain and which make the young readers laugh at him, since, they consider it as a way to revenge the villain adult. However, the adults have another view concerning the “subversive” which they believe it raises the sense of rebelling against the adult as well as, humour needs to be as much as possible socially conservative. In other words, humour should not encourage the youngsters to break one of the social values, in this case respecting the adult (Cross)

The extensive use of the parody convention, melodrama and irony strengthens the humorous functions in the Gothic text. Cross has identified three stages young readers need to consider so they will be able to understand irony; which are avoiding the literal understanding of irony, avoiding regarding irony as mistaken and not to confuse irony with the other humorous elements. Parody also is problematic for young readers, which is about exaggerating the humorous imitations of the original text genre or style. Parody in nature is a combination of the original and parodic texts. According to Cross, the difficulty lies within the interconnection of the humorous forms of parody and irony which makes it harder for the children to grasp and understand the literary work (Cross).

Taking into account all what is presented in the story concerning Count Olaf as cruel, evil and wicked, yet Olaf ironically states: “ ‘I guess you’ve found me out,” Olaf said simply. “I suppose you’re right: I’ll go to prison, and you and the other orphans will go free. Now, why don’t you run up to your room and wake your sisters? I’m sure they’ll want to know all about your grand victory over my evil ways” (*The Bad Beginning* 98-9).

While Olaf is ironically speaking to Klaus when he has discovered the reason behind the play and confronts Olaf by verses from the nuptial law. But Olaf does not seem scared or nervous

and this mainly projects that Olaf ensures a second plan to take place totally opposite to what he has stated that he will go to jail and punished. Such indirect irony invites readers who are familiar with Count Olaf to read between the lines as it requires a high recognition and understanding of the sophisticated forms of irony (Cross).

Another key concept among the high humour elements Cross has tackled which is highly associated with the Gothic is the parody of melodrama. The parody of melodrama is: “Melodrama is associated with sensationalism, and was a popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth century, and so is generally considered a lowly form. In melodrama, the (often persecuted) good are always rewarded and the wicked villains (normally overtly evil) are punished” (Cross). The parody of melodrama is a technique which is concerned with how the events will happen. As a result, expecting the upcoming events of certain story by the readers is debatable; whether to be considered as a part of the humorous contributing elements of creating pleasure or to be neglected. Cross adds: “While some humour theorists point out the vital importance of surprise in humour ... others reveal that the element of surprise is not essential, and that there is a different source of pleasure in humorous expectation, as the reader eagerly anticipates what they know will ultimately happen”.

In the Comic Gothic texts, Handler’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* has gained a huge success in the world of children’s literature, yet it is rarely cited or deeply analyzed. Little reference to the novel as a separate body of analysis has been achieved; as Pons states: “Academic articles about *A Series of Unfortunate Events* are few ...” (271). Some scholars have studied it mainly in comparison to other works. However, others are worried about the novel as it is too dark and are concerned with the novel’s impact on the children.

Other criticism has been established by a number of the adult readers who regard Gothic separated or blended with Comic as useless. It is only another tool authors use to terrify the young readers through a black vision of the world as scenes of death and

kidnapping. They have added that even the conflict of good and evil does not require such amount of darkness. Olson adds that the harshest criticism the series ever received is that of the parents. The children readers' parents described the novel being "horrible and sadistic" and unworthy to be read by their kids while they have the choice to read other stories which seem cheerful rather than reading about dark themes (513-4).

The scene of Violet the bride breaks one of the conservative values as Count Olaf attempts to control the Baudelaires' fortune; which may have negative impression as the novel is devoted to children from age groups. In addition, the novel can be criticized for being repetitive and so predictable. Throughout the thirteen volumes of the series, Handler each time presents the kids as hunted by Count Olaf; however, he fails to take control of their fortune; as a result, the readers will face him again disguised in a new character. The novel seems cyclic in a way or another.

All in all, the whole chapter has attempted to discuss Lemony Snicket's series in order to analyze the first book *The Bad Beginning's* blending of the Comic-Gothic features in the novel building. Through detecting the Gothic construction of the novel's villain Count Olaf and the children's characterization, the Comic features are revealed either in a dialogue, event or a character description. The study is concerned with identifying the role of such genre which has largely contributed in the cognitive, critical and didactic skills and abilities; literature is entertaining tool, also it is educational instrument.

Conclusion

As a conclusion and after a long exciting journey of investigating Handler's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*; it can be said that such a literary production, which has been credited for its creativity, deserves the title of being one of the best icons of the Comic Gothic in the world of Children's literature. In fact, it is only due to Handler's successful use of a very simple language through which he has offered a number of explanations and definitions of words which may appear difficult for the child reader.

The present study examined the working of the 'Comic' and 'Gothic' together in children's literature. The two modes have been studied in the novel entitled *The Bad Beginning* by Daniel Handler using the pen name of Lemony Snicket. The novel was published in 1999. And it tells the story of the three orphaned Baudelaires who had suffered the greediness of their relative guardian Count Olaf after their parents' death; as he has used different disguised characters throughout the 13 volumes of the series.

Far away from the simplicity of the language which has been used, Handler has successfully manipulated the language in a way or another in order to be able to bring all what is dramatic, tragic, miserable and dark to the stage of interest. Such style reflects Handler's attempt to reduce the degree of the darkness and terror, as well as, to prevent shocking his children readers through the events of his story.

Handler has adopted an unusual and rare style of writing for children. Yet, such quirky style is a special trend of a writer and can be detected in many of his works. He opens the story in a sad tone; the protagonists have just lost both of their parents in a fire. However, Handler prepares and warns the readers that his story is an unusual story which is filled with unfortunate series of events from the very beginning. In fact, the title itself is as an indicator

of the Gothic trend's presence in the novel which is fused with a pinch of humour from time to time to make the story befitting to its audience.

As a result, *The Bad Beginning* has become the core interest of the present study while it has become the best applicable documentation of blending Comic-Gothic Children's literature by a skillful writer. In addition, it has provided a ground for studying such hybrid marriage through a new developing sphere of interest for many writers and offered the opportunity to deal with such a masterpiece identifying the genres (comic and gothic) parameters easily in the novel.

The existence of the Comic Gothic blending in a work like the one of Handler is beneficial in a way or another for the development and the spread of popularity of children's literature. Among the results and the benefits of incorporating the Comic and the Gothic in Handler's work for children is to be able to overcome the difficulty of understanding the different forms of Humour and Gothic as children develop their cognitive and emotional status as readers.

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في كيفية دمج العناصر الكوميديّة القوطية في الأدب الموجه للأطفال، حيث أنها معنية بموضوع البحث في الجزء الأول من سلسلة من الأحداث المؤسفة لدانيال هاندلر بعنوان البداية السيئة التي تم نشرها سنة 1999. تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن المزيج الكوميدي القوطي يساهم في تطور الأدب الموجه للأطفال كنوع أدبي قائم بحد ذاته، وذلك بفضل مختلف التقنيات الأدبية المضافة لهذا الأخير، كما أن أسلوب هاندلر في روايته البداية السيئة يساهم بطريقة أو بأخرى في تطور النواحي الإدراكية و العاطفية للطفل القارئ من خلال إظهار عتمة القوطية عبر الكوميديا.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à rechercher et étudier la façon d'intégrer les éléments Comiques dans la littérature Gothique destinée aux enfants. Cette étude est impliquée dans la recherche sur le sujet du roman intitulé *Mauvais Départ*, de Daniel Handler, publié en 1999, sachant que ce roman est la première partie de son ouvrage intitulé *Une Série D'événements Malheureux*. Parmi les résultats de cette étude on trouve que la mixture Comédie Gothique contribue au développement de la littérature pour enfants comme une sorte des travaux littéraires grâce à de diverses techniques littéraires ajoutées à celle-ci. Ainsi que déjà mentionné, le style de Handler a permis le développement chez l'enfant lecteur des côtés cognitifs et émotionnels en montrant l'obscurité du Gothique à travers la Comédie.