

## Introduction:

Over The Garden Wall is a 2D mini-animated series created by Patrick McHale premiered on Cartoon Network channel in November of 2014.

The series is based on McHale's animated short "Tome of the Unknown" released during the Halloween season of the previous year, featuring two half-brothers, Wirt and Greg, who are lost in a mysterious place regarded as the 'unknown' and needed to find their way home.

McHale was inspired by multiple sources of vintage and classic arts style that are rare in the animation industry, especially in children's cartoon

BUT perhaps the most interesting inspiration of all is Dante's inferno.

But what is Dante's inferno? Ladies and Gentlemen, Inferno is the first third part of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy poem book in 1320 where the poet himself travel through 9 circles of hell and surprisingly in Over the Garden Wall, the number of episode make references to that particular circle of hell.

Quick examples include:

Limbo. Not limbo like that obviously, Limbo in Inferno is the first circle of hell where "unbaptised and virtuous pagans" wait around for the salvation by Christ. In the animation, there is a town named 'pottsfeld' where the people were waiting for the 'harvest' which is a reference to Jesus' salvation in Christian text (Trey,2015). At the end of the episode, it turned out that the pumpkin people are just a bunch of skeletons in pumpkins costume.

One of the characters said to Wirt "...aren't you a little too early?...it doesn't seem like you're ready to join us just yet" which foreshadow how Wirt isn't dead nor alive. It suggests that he's in the in-between but will eventually join them someday since death is inevitable.

In inferno, the seventh circle is 'violence'. It is a place where people who committed crime against one another or against themselves got punished. In the book, the people who commit suicide turn into trees where a mythical creature; Harpies feed on their leaves.

In episode 10 of the animation, it has been reveal that children who are lost or have given up hope turn into Edelwood trees where they would be

chopped and grind into tree oil by The Woodsmen who then feed the lantern that keep Beast alive.

Lucifer in Dante's ninth circle of hell; Treachery, are similar to the Beast in the sense that "…both are sinners and both wish to lead souls into damnation" (Wilson, 2015).

The Beast tried to trick Wirt to be the next Lantern Bearer, pretending that all hope is now lost. He also previously tried the woodsmen into thinking that his daughter's soul is in the lantern.

He also made Greg waited in the cold with his riddles so that greg would freeze to death.

Perhaps, the most chilling of all is the song he sang to lure those who are 'Lost'.

\*Plays song\*

From the lyrics we can see how Beast is manipulating his victims into thinking that Death is the only answer to all their sufferings.

Now you might be thinking to yourself "Wait a minute" isn't Cartoon Network's target audience from 6- 12 years old? This is a little dark. Well, just like Happy Tree Friends, the cuter the design, the more space the owner has to exercise the power of monstrosity (Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, 2007).

With that being said, I want to talk about the shape and colour theory of the characters in Over The Garden Wall.

But before we get into that, let me take you through the basic first.

Circle shape is perceived as soft, squishy, harmless, approachable and changeable

Square shape is perceive as solid, sturdy, strong, supportive, reliable and inflexible

While triangle shape is perceive as directional, dynamic, dangerous and unpredictable

This is not always the case since shapes can be used to confused the audience about the protagonist and antagonist since they are not what they look like.

“A Character constructed with friendly round shape that is revealed as a villain goes against the expectation” - (Nieminen, 2017)

And since “...people need identification figures - characters they can relate to, in whole they can see some aspect of themselves” (Withrow & Dinner, 2007, p 135), I present you our awkward teen protagonist- Wirt (14 YO)

Wirt has a triangle hat that stand out the most compared to other part of his outfit. It's unusual tall's appearance gives the audience an uneasy feelings while also reflected Wirt's character of being disturbed by his surrounding.

He has a circular face which made the character appear more friendly in contrast to his hat. However, compared to Clarence from the show; Clarence, that was aired on the same year, Wirt still has more of a mysterious feelings to him.

And this could be because of his triangular cape which make him almost appear as a triangle shape in general. His overall appearance make him seems unpredictable since we don't know what he's hiding inside his cape, making the audience more cautious about him.

On to the colour because colour is “the attribute of visual experience that can be described as having quantitatively specific dimension of hue, saturation, and brightness”

Colour is a branch of linguistics that has to do with perception and psychology - (Quote more on colour in our journal)

for Wirt's character.

The use of red, which is a warm colour, can signify danger (Chapman, 2021) which suggests Wire's constant worry that Beast is going to find them.

It may be used to confuse the audience since red is psychologically known for aggression and obtrusion (Goldstein, 1942) while Wirt is awkward, melodramatic and has a low self-esteem.

Also, Red has the longest wavelength making our brain spot it first (De Grandis, 1986) and this helps the audience shift their attention more to him more compared to Greg.

Another main colour of Wirt is purple which evokes sadness, mysterious, frustration and wisdom (Cherry, 2022).

Wirt can always be seen complaining and being pessimistic. He's also an audience surrogate who reacts to their situation of getting lost.

However, he surprised the audience with his knowledge of interior design, playing the bassoon and was able to escape Beast's trick.

Now on to Greg or Gregory. As you can see his overall design can be described as "round" which suggests Greg's liveliness and how harmless he is as a young child. He is the embodiment of youth.

Greg's hat/teapot is Grey which indicates the feelings of being depressed and moody. It gives a great contrast to Greg who is really optimistic and almost air-headed.

His main colour is green which suggests growth and the feelings of being down to Earth (Chapman, 2021) and adaptability (Besant and Leadbeater, 1901). He finds happiness in all situations and befriends people despite how unsettling the person might be.

At this point I want to point out how the colours of the brothers' hats demonstrate impressions that are totally different from their personalities. This is again, a great technique because apart from the design being visually pleasing, it also plays with the audience's expectation.

Now we are going to talk about Beast whose design are really similar to Herne Hunter, Wendigo and Der Erlkönig (Der air-Koo-nichéee) etc.

Beast has what we call “abstract shapes” which require people to break down the shapes (Ayudhia S, 2020) as it is uncommon. He has the ability to shape shift and it gives a big impact on the audience because of the unpredictability, making the audience more cautious about his appearance within the series.

Hence, it almost come as a shock when it was revealed in the last episode that his body is a unison of faces of those he consumed (footnote here from tvtrope).

Beast main colour is ‘Black’ which associated with power, nobility, mystery andddd Death.

Everyone in the Unknown fear the Beast since he always lurk in the woods seeking for his victims

Beast is an example of “anthropomorphism” where instead of behaving like his name, he is really well-spoken, civil and enjoy singing. Behaving almost like a sinister noble.

Another colour for Beast is ‘white’ which associated with purity and virtue, in contrast to Beast who is cunning and feed on “sorrow and fears”

White can also suggest mourning and death since beast takes lives of those who’re lost.

The beast’s eyes also suggest ‘The white light’ which is what people see when they’re about to die or when they don’t have a will to live.

In addition to the mentioning of Beast’s true form, the used of red/pink may also indicate bloods and danger as well.

Overall, the style of the character design help with the mood of the animation since it appears friendlier, yet remain somewhat creepy.

But! Why is Over The Garden Wall so significance??? I will now talk about the historical and cultural context of American horror that may have influences Over The Garden Wall.

According to research, American are more focus on how the supernatural comes to be and what it is. The storyline also involves the motive of the attackers being secondary importance. (Marak, 2014).

Wirt and Greg are in the unknown because they are drowning in real life and hence they're in the in-between of life and death.

We found Beast's motive on wanting to consume children on the last episode since we are more focus on how the brothers will get out of the unknown.

"Children are coded as innocent" (Cowan, 2009),

The story concerning children make it more disturbing to the audience. Examples of this statement include William Golding's Lord of the Flies and Stephen King's IT.

EP1 03:02 - "This isn't a place for children! Don't you know the Beast is afoot here"

Within 3 minutes into the series, we immediately have a strong prejudice against the Beast from the beginning without him doing anything due to the Woodsmen's reaction of find the brothers in the wood.

In [Projected Fears: Horror Films and American Culture](#) : Horror Films and American Culture (R. Phillips, 2005), it was mentioned that Dracula from the 1931 movie, used the fear of the unknown against the audience because he isn't an immediate or visible threat.

We can see the same technique of 'Anticipation' being used in Over The Garden Wall where the Beast made an official appearance at the end of episode 4 demanding the Woodsmen on the whereabouts of the brothers. It would be 3 episodes later until we see the Beast again with bigger threat level. In this scene, he manipulated the Woodsmen that trading the

children's soul with his daughter's soul in the lantern is the only way to save her.

Before I end my presentation, I just want to mention that Cartoon Network hasn't release any cartoon that has horror based element since 2008. There are some creepy elements in recent show for ex Adventure time (2010) and Regular show (2009) but in my humble opinion, it doesn't have strong obvious horror halloween-based elements like the former shows.

- When was the idea pitch and what was happening during those times? 2006 but didn't develop it.
- When was it commenced and what was happening during those times? 2004 (the best time of cn animation)

Basically the peak of horror theme animation of cartoon network

Hence, this three Emmy winners animation is a revolution on horror animation for children not to just cartoon network, but also for the overall animation industry which seems to focus on comedy than the horror aspect for example *Hotel Transylvania* and *Adams family*.

Therefore, *Over The Garden Wall* is unique and bring back nostalgic feelings for those who grew up with horror animation like myself.

This animation is rich with symbolisms and historical references that I would love to make more research in the future.

But for now thank you for listening.

Production context:

Character design:

- Character shapes
- Colour theory

Historical and cultural context: