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# **The Gothic Elements of David Mitchell's Slade House**

Gotické prvky románu D. Mitchella Dům za zdí

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Tereza Vondrášková

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## **Anotace**

Práce v úvodní teoretické části představí tradici anglického gotického románu a definuje základní témata, motivy, poetiku a představitele gotické literární tradice v anglickém románu. Následující kapitola představí autora Davida Mitchella a jeho dílo v kontextu současné britské literární scény v porovnání s dalšími autory gotické tradice v současné literatuře (Neil Gaiman). Jádrem práce bude literárněvědná analýza románu *Slade House*, která se soustředí na vyprávěcí techniku románu (střídání vypravěčů), gotické prvky hororové atmosféry a gradace napětí, prvky fantastické literatury (přízraky v domě) a na pojetí uzavřeného prostoru strašidelného domu podle studií M. Aguirra (*The Closed Space*) aj. Práce zmíní teoretický koncept N. Roylea *The Uncanny* a v závěru se pokusí vystihnout podstatu pojmu v díle D. Mitchella *Slade House*.

## **Abstract**

This thesis introduces the tradition of the English Gothic novel and defines the basic themes, motives, and poetics, and names the representatives of the Gothic literary tradition in the English novel. The following chapter introduces the author David Mitchell and his work in the context of contemporary British literature in comparison with other authors of the Gothic tradition in contemporary literature (Neil Gaiman). The core of the work is a literary analysis of the novel *Slade House*, which focuses on the narrative technique of the novel (alternation of narrators), Gothic elements of horror atmosphere and suspense gradation, elements of fantastic literature (ghosts in the house) and the concept of a haunted house based on the studies of M. Aguirre (*The Closed Space*), etc. The thesis mentions Royle's theoretical concept of *The Uncanny* and in the final section it attempts to capture the essence of the concept in Mitchell's *Slade House*.

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## Introduction

This thesis centres around a literary analysis of *Slade House* by David Mitchell. For the most part, it deals with the Gothic elements utilized in the novel. The goal of the thesis is to analyse the devices used to induce fear or uneasiness and the techniques David Mitchell and others employ in their writing, namely the narrative structure, suspense gradation, and elements of horror, as well as the fantastic.

The theoretical part offers an introduction into the Gothic as a genre, describes its initial reception, and tries to explain its persistent appeal. The following pages attempt to highlight selected features of Gothic fiction which can be specifically connected to *Slade House* and characterize them across various literary works. Additionally, Nicholas Royle's study of the Uncanny based on Sigmund Freud's essay *Das Unheimliche* is presented and eventually applied to the examined book.

A brief unit of the theoretical part focuses on liminality as it is a concept vital for analyses of books where the fantastic, the real, and the terrifying blend seamlessly. The chapter presents Farah Mendlesohn's classification of fantasy: *Portal-Quest*, *Immersive*, *Intrusion*, and *Liminal*. To enable the best possible understanding, famous works of fiction meeting the criteria of said categories are referred to.

The consecutive chapters lay out succinct biographies of David Mitchell and an author who is in many ways similar, Neil Gaiman. Their career paths are summarized, covering the most celebrated works, with the aim of comparing their creative processes, impact, and the type of stories they produce.

The practical part first examines the interconnections in Mitchell's books, a characteristic feature of his work, and subsequently offers an analysis of the novel picked as the central piece of fiction for this thesis - *Slade House*, and the Gothic elements present in the story. The concept of The Uncanny is explored again in the final section of the paper and considerable attention is paid to its effects on the reader.

# 1 Gothic Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce Gothic as a literary genre, explain its appeal and significance today and present prominent representatives of Gothic fiction. The following lines offer an overview of the most common gothic elements in connection to the topic of this thesis and interpret the concept of the Uncanny. Subsequently, the last part of the chapter deals with liminality as it represents the ambiguous transition between horror and fantasy, as well as the passage through different realities.

## 1.1 Introduction to Gothic Literature

Providing an accurate introduction into Gothic literature is not an easy task for the approaches differ significantly, and Gothic writing has been developing quite freely and in diverse shapes. The genre itself seems to be hard to grasp as well given that it occasionally inconspicuously merges with other genres.

Gothic writing could be defined as a form of dark romanticism frequently employing a mysterious atmosphere where dread, terror and melodrama often prevail. One cannot omit the utilization of scenery and setting, authors predominantly use places such as old castles or churches, ruins, graveyards, and haunted houses which help induce an eerie atmosphere. The boundaries of reality, as well as those between romance and horror, are often unclear. The term Gothic novel was first used in 1764 by Horace Walpole in his famous story *The Castle of Otranto – a Gothic story*.<sup>1</sup>

The reception in those times was not the most positive: „*Like romances before them, Gothic novels were irrational, improper and immoral wastes of time. What was worse, however, was that they were popular as T.J. Matthias observes in The Pursuits of Literature (1796): ‘The spirit of enquiry which Horace Walpole introduced was rather frivolous, though pleasing, and his Otranto Ghosts have propagated their species with unequalled fecundity. The spawn is in every novel shop’*“<sup>2</sup> Literary scene was dominated by the opinion that the fantastic and gothic writing did not deserve the recognition of “great” realistic literature at the time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hogle, J. E. (2002). *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge University Press. p. 63

<sup>2</sup> Botting, F. (2005). *Gothic*. Routledge. p. 29

<sup>3</sup> Bloom, C. (ed). (1998). *Gothic Horror: A Reader’s Guide from Poe to King and Beyond*. Macmillan. p. 126

However, Walpole's tale of romance and the supernatural helped pave the way for a new genre that has become extremely popular throughout the years despite its initial neglect. Some of the most prominent Gothic authors who enriched the literary world with their work include Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Mary Shelley, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Brontë, Sheridan Le Fanu, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Henry James or H.P. Lovecraft.<sup>4</sup>

Although the works of Gothic first gained mostly negative critique for their lack of morality and excess of monstrosity, e.g., M. G. Lewis's *The Monk: "Lust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature, brought together, without the apology of probability, or even possibility for their introduction. To make amends, the moral is general and very practical; it is, 'not to deal in witchcraft and magic because the devil will have you at last!!' We are sorry to observe that good talents have been misapplied in the production of this monster. (The British Critic 7, June 1796, p. 677)"*<sup>5</sup> the genre grew popular and appears to be even stronger now with countless contributions in movies and popular books. David Mitchell and Neil Gaiman, contemporary British authors creatively incorporating the Gothic into their fiction, will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

I often wonder what causes the appeal of the Gothic. Among the reasons for its popularity could possibly be the fact that it often permeates boundaries and plays with the readers' minds in a multitude of ways, sometimes intriguing and playful, sometimes downright frightening. Additionally, the Gothic has been frequently used as a convenient tool for psychological analysis, and vice versa it became possible to grasp the literature better through the lens of psychoanalysis.<sup>6</sup>

Some people might expect that individuals with anxiety or depression would opt out of this type of entertainment since it tends to be filled with uncertainty and the events described can easily trigger a trauma response. But maybe it is just the opposite and dealing with certain obstacles in a fictional environment turns out to be ever so useful. We should also be able to distinguish horror and terror when horror is regarded as much more explicit and physical (e.g., violent murders, cannibalism), whereas terror is a great representation of the sublime and could be described as greatly disturbing,

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<sup>4</sup> Bloom. *Chronology of Significant Horror and Ghost Tales*. xiii - xv

<sup>5</sup> Botting, p. 21

<sup>6</sup> Punter, D. (ed.). (2012). *A New Companion to the Gothic*. Wiley-Blackwell. p. 307



but in a less brutal way.<sup>7</sup> The latter is largely psychological and tends to be more prevalent in the Gothic literature. According to Punter, there might be a number of different reasons for us to read and watch such spine-chilling stories, one possibility is that a part of us feels the need to be tested – to see how much of the macabre we can endure, another and probably more meaningful is a sense of measuring up to what we dread in the real world. That suggests that by watching something terrifying we could become more resilient toward everyday fears.<sup>8</sup> The last eminent argument brings forward the supernatural and the common experience of inexplicable occurrences. A large proportion of Gothic fiction deals with the paranormal and not only do these elements help create the atmosphere of suspense and menace, they also serve as a mirror to humanity and its flaws.

## 1.2 Gothic Elements in Literature

All the writers listed above, beginning with Horace Walpole, of course, knew how to flawlessly incorporate the basic elements of the Gothic into their stories. The characteristic ingredients include a gloomy and dark atmosphere, suspense, inexplicable events, trauma, and repressed memories, mysterious, isolated houses or mansions, curses, and prophecies, the supernatural, and inter alia, objects with extraordinary meaning.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the most prominent elements of the Gothic will be introduced and analysed in this chapter. The concept of closed space and haunted houses, supernatural creatures, visually significant objects, time, (in)sanity, and the Uncanny, specifically. Furthermore, Gothic authors seem to follow a distinct linguistic pattern. A reader may notice that certain expressions and metonymies have the power to induce suspension or suggest danger, menace, and even the supernatural. In addition to these phrases, authors habitually benefit from the use of onomatopoeic words which phonetically mirror the words they describe such as creak, shriek, howl, growl...<sup>10</sup>

*“And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges **creaked**)—I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye.”*

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<sup>7</sup> Punter, p. 93

<sup>8</sup> MSRS UNCANNY. (2019). *The Gothic A Lecture*. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/gAQ-uBEy2iA>

<sup>9</sup> Botting, p. 29

<sup>10</sup> Harris, R. (2020). *Elements of the Gothic novel*. VirtualSalt. <https://www.virtualsalt.com/elements-of-the-gothic-novel>

“Presently I heard a slight **groan**, and I knew it was the **groan** of mortal terror. It was not a **groan** of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well.”<sup>11</sup>

Examples of metonymic usage are shown in the table below.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1: The Metonymy of Gloom and Horror**

wind, especially howling	rain, especially blowing
doors grating on rusty hinges	sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
footsteps approaching	clanking chains
lights in abandoned rooms	gusts of wind blowing out lights
characters trapped in a room	doors suddenly slamming shut
ruins of buildings	baying of distant dogs (or wolves?)
thunder and lightning	crazed laughter

Source: VirtualSalt

### 1.2.1 Space

Places where the often upsetting and thrilling tales take place play a significant role in the narrative. Mysterious castles or an untamed moor help emphasise the atmosphere much finer than a sunny office building for instance. But to be fair, it is not necessary to describe haunted houses or graveyards, authors may choose almost any type of a building, ancient or modern, be it family houses, hotels, cottages, laboratories, or warehouses, and apply it impeccably as a setting for the story. Moreover, an almost forgotten ruin of a castle or a mansion with creaky floors, faded curtains, and neglected looks as a setting, functions as a possible metaphor for the moral decay of its inhabitants. Then there are often hard-to-reach rooms or secret chambers where someone or something can be locked up and sudden access to said rooms lifts the curtain of ignorance and disrupts the original sense of safety if there was one to begin with. Aguirre implies the ambivalence of security in a brief statement: “*The safety of a Closed Space breeds its own terrors.*”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Poe, E. A. (2000, originally published 1843). *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume 2: The Tell-Tale Heart*. Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2148/2148-h/2148-h.htm#chap2.20>

<sup>12</sup> Harris. <https://www.virtualsalt.com/gothic.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Aguirre, M. (1990). *The Closed Space: Horror Literature and Western Symbolism*. Manchester University Press. p.

The inside space is generally viewed as a place of safety guarding us against the outside where the danger can prevalently be found. When the opposite happens and the insides of a closed space become unsafe, that is where the magic of gothic thrill is the most powerful. Such space can easily turn into a personal prison and add to the torment of the confined character.

Horace Walpole himself built his own mansion The Strawberry Hill House and according to his words that was the place where he had a nightmare which resulted in writing *The Castle of Otranto*. It was popular with visitors during his lifetime and continues to be adored to this day.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.2.2 Monsters

People started to abandon myths and superstition while scientific progress gained more interest in the eighteenth century. It was in the realm of Gothic fiction where supernatural creatures continued to thrive, and they still seem to be relevant hundreds of years later. Monsters served as a mirror of the biggest fears that troubled society at the time. Mainly in the 1800s one of the burdensome concerns of people was what could happen if science went too far. It is possible to name a few of the most prominent monsters in literature ever, such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein's Monster*, or *Dr Jekyll's* terrible counterpart, *Mr Hyde*. Interestingly enough, many of these tales feature doctors or men of science, which only proves the angst present in the Victorian society that followed the technological revolution. The world was changing, set order of things disrupted, moral values threatened and *Doctor Frankenstein* superseded *Doctor Faustus* as the visitor of the other.<sup>15</sup> Scientific pursuits could be used for the benefit of society or its destruction, it only depends on the intentions and behaviour of people in power. Another considerable anxiety is inflicted by the monster within, our own personal demons – the atrocities we can perpetrate, the duality of self and the darkness of human nature.

Although the atemporal beings ("**Soul Carnivores**") in *Slade House* are not straightforwardly defined as bloodthirsty vampires, after taking a closer look at the way they parasitically consume a victim's soul to survive, the concept of vampires seems fitting. Since they do not possess the traditional characteristics of a vampire, it is not the most accurate comparison, albeit probably the

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<sup>14</sup> Horace Walpole. (2018). *Strawberry Hill House & Garden*. <http://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk/the-house/history/horace-walpole/>

<sup>15</sup> Bloom, p. 217

closest one.<sup>16</sup> The wealth of literary material connected to vampires seems immense. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* unquestionably belong among the best-known Vampire stories ever written in English, with *Carmilla* described as a hideous woman with gleaming eyes and "teeth set as if in fury"<sup>17</sup> and Count Dracula becoming the icon of vampirism with his sensuality, unreflecting image<sup>18</sup>, "pale, gaunt features, demonic eyes, libertinism, capabilities of metamorphosis, and immortality."<sup>19</sup> The ingenuity of writers who have incorporated the vampire element is admirable; there have been exquisitely told stories linking occultism and romanticism describing a rich spectre of vampiric forms: from an ominous orchid and leeches to the devilishly hungry undead<sup>20</sup>, with common themes of possession, physical and/or psychic predation and prolonging one's youth or bringing the dead back to life<sup>21</sup>, which is a solid source of dismay since it erodes the laws of nature.

### 1.2.3 Clocks, Mirrors, Portraits

Objects like clocks, mirrors, and portraits often serve as a doorway to other worlds and since they appear in various Gothic novels, the most distinctive being Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, they can be considered quite typical for the genre.

A crisis of identity can be recognized in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* where the protagonist desperately craves to shed her naive youth and grow into a refined woman as similar to the late Rebecca de Winter as possible. As a matter of fact, her entire nameless self is only defined as the opposite of what Rebecca was. When the girl begins living at Manderley, she aspires to model herself in the image of Rebecca – allegedly graceful, bold, accomplished, and painfully alive in the minds of others. It is impossible to unsee the journey of doubling once the girl adopts her signature. It almost feels as if she was possessed when attempting to mirror Rebecca's behaviour and looks. The spite and hate eat her up from the inside to the extent that she resembles the picture of Rebecca she did not even know – a pale and conceivably ill woman with a broken heart. When Maxim admits the feelings he held towards his late wife and the true nature of their relationship, it only adds another alluring layer to Rebecca's and the girl's portraiture.

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<sup>16</sup> Soul Carnivores in relation to vampirism will be further discussed in the Analysis of Slade House

<sup>17</sup> Bloom, p. 63

<sup>18</sup> Botting, p. 96

<sup>19</sup> Botting, p. 95

<sup>20</sup> Bloom, pp. 64-69

<sup>21</sup> Botting, p. 77

In like manner, it is more than obvious that a portrait serves as a crucial symbol in Wilde's only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This decadent horror follows the life story of a handsome young man whose consciousness completely disintegrates as he commits more and more horrible acts. His portrait painted by Basil Hallward accurately depicts the atrocities and becomes incredibly hideous, representing the decay of Dorian's soul. Another motif worth highlighting is Dorian's relationship to the picture; after realizing what is happening with the painting, the young man immediately hides it in the attic. He does so for two main reasons: the fear it might be of evidence against him and the inability to bear the fact that it shows who he really is. At first, there is at least some hope for redemption as Dorian believes he could go back to acting virtuously and reverse what happened to the portrait. On the contrary, it seems that by concealing the painting, he only committed to a lawless and selfish life.

Dorian Gray seems to have hit absolute rock bottom in the shocking ending of the book. It is up for debate whether he loathes himself, but he certainly hates the evidence of his debauchery and evil crimes. After gazing at it "*he could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite,*"<sup>22</sup> Gray contemplates whether or not he should confess, but a self-preservation instinct along with anger take over as he grabs the knife used to kill Basil and stabs the dreaded mirror-painting. At that precise moment, Dorian drops dead on the floor and his body morphs into that of a worn-out man. He may have killed the past, but when doing so Dorian Gray had also taken his own life. Perhaps we could pity him for he wasn't able to find any form of salvation and although he had matured from the naive self-absorbed youngster, he failed in learning to navigate his life and be responsible for his deeds.

What is also interesting is the effect of perceived beauty or unattractiveness on one's general acceptance, a situation observable in the Victorian Gothic works I'm going to discuss once more in regard to the duality of self. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrayal of "young Adonis" attempts to conceal Dorian's corruption<sup>23</sup> considering no one could even imagine that a person as beautiful as Dorian could ever do such terrible deeds. Likewise, Doctor Jekyll is well-nigh always described as an honourable smooth-faced scientist, and his evil-doing counterpart is consistently depicted as a ghastly deformed beast driven by his libido.<sup>24</sup> Reputation, more than appearance is what keeps Dr

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<sup>22</sup> Wilde, O. (2003). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (R. Mighall, ed.). Penguin Classics. p. 245

<sup>23</sup> Müller, K. (2017). *Beautiful Corruption: The Portrayal of Beauty in the Picture of Dorian Gray and Lady Audley's Secret*. Lund University.

<sup>24</sup> Hogle, 199

Jekyll out of suspicion, and his relationship to such repugnant creature is more than puzzling for his bourgeois comrades. Even if we accept Jekyll's written explanation and rejection of Hyde's malfeasance, Jekyll and Hyde are still two dimensions of one (divided) individual, and their physical and visual separation allows him to succumb to somewhat primal needs and carry out the sickening acts of violence with impunity. At the same time, the presence and 'victory' of monstrous Mr Hyde does not make the goodness of Dr Jekyll untrue.

#### **1.2.4 Time**

There is an apparent distortion of time in a number of gothic works and an observable contrast between the present and former times, where the past always comes through. As Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote: "*Shall we never, never get rid of this Past? It lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body! In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant.*"<sup>25</sup> Ghosts are undeniably the most powerful tools for demonstrating how the past can haunt us. What caused Scrooge's dramatic transformation at the end of Dickens' Christmas Carol? The unpleasant visions shown by the spirits who visited him. It forced him to see the reality and contemplate about his life, maybe the whole experience awakened a conscience in him. Additional discomfort is created when the text transports a modern protagonist to an unfamiliar and almost archaic place in time.

The pace oftentimes shifts depending on the situation or from the perspective of individual characters; time can fly, drag, heal, or kill. Some portion of gothic fiction holds time or aging and its unusual properties as a central motif of the story, for example, the fates of *Benjamin Button* or previously noted *Dorian Gray*.

#### **1.2.5 Sanity and Madness**

Gothic authors put an emphasis on the unpredictability, despair, and sometimes violence of insanity in their stories. Mental instability and irrational behaviour add to the thrill and angst of the unknown. A character who is not sane tends to act in an unforeseeable manner and is thus difficult to comprehend. The unstable and incomprehensible character can be naturally perilous considering the others never know what to expect. And such a simple fact makes it attractive to read on. Even the Brontë sisters utilized this factor very effectively in their works, especially in *Jane Eyre*. This notion is neatly explored in *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

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<sup>25</sup> Hawthorne, N. (1981). *House of the Seven Gables*. Bantam Classics. p. 139

The authors of the study wanted to reshape the paradigm in which female characters were written and declared that female authors too had to resort to writing women either as angelic ladies or mad-anti heroines<sup>26</sup> (monsters even), always locked in the double bind pre-set by the male authors who only dared to see women from this twofold perspective.<sup>27</sup>

The term madness is not medically precise, but it encapsulates everything related to the mind that is perceived as not normal and perhaps pathological. According to Freud, the characters, as well as the author, might be neurotic or insane in a number of ways.<sup>28</sup> Exploration of sometimes disturbing psychological states can be remarkably interesting and useful, but on the other hand, there is no doubt that it adds to the stigmatisation of people with mental health issues who are often viewed as dangerous. Social taboos, themes of gender, sexuality, and identity are frequently discussed in Gothic literature and sometimes they turn into a source of controversy. It is well known that several favoured novels hinted at homosexuality or bisexuality, nevertheless Punter claims that the number of books is much greater, however many of them had been censored for they show unconventional desires.<sup>29</sup>

Major works concerning the decay of human soul; *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* undoubtedly regard insanity to a certain point. We can witness the duality of man in both works, however, the concept is much more conspicuous in the latter. I believe Stevenson wanted to point out that there ought to be two sides of the human character, both the good and virtuous as well as the wicked and perhaps what counts is the decisions one makes. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde not only managed to capture Dorian's disunity, but he equally exposed sometimes repressed aspects of his own personality, Dorian, Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward all resemble the author to some extent. Conceivably, we could spot another remark on the workings of Victorian society – the majority suppressed their emotions and desires similarly to Doctor Jekyll.

Venturing deeper into the psychiatric issues traditionally associated with the two literary works named in the preceding paragraph could be beneficial and worth it, but that is not the focus of this thesis, therefore I will only attempt to deliver a basic breakdown. A common misconception

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<sup>26</sup> Gubar, S., & Gilbert, S. M. (2020). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press. p. 80

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert, Gubar, p. 64

<sup>28</sup> Punter, p. 481

<sup>29</sup> Punter, p. 250

informally interprets a split personality as schizophrenia, but that is a misnomer. Schizophrenia is a group of mental disorders characterised by a split from reality; inability to distinguish real experience, frequent hallucinations and abnormal emotional response,<sup>30</sup> whereas the condition of multiple personalities that could be likened to the Jekyll and Hyde syndrome is now defined as dissociative identity disorder. In this case, two or more distinct personalities are present and the transition from one to another is sudden.<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, Dr Jekyll does indeed exhibit symptoms of schizophrenia – he might be delusional, hallucinating and his thinking can be perceived as disorganized. Looking back at Dorian Gray, the narcissistic personality disorder<sup>32</sup> comes to mind.

### 1.3 The Uncanny

What scares us? What is it that keeps readers and viewers awake at night after going through a frightening novel or watching a particularly well-made horror movie? The answer seems to be obvious: we are afraid of the unknown, of the things or people that we fail to understand. However, perceiving everything that is alien to us as evil or scary might be deeply unhealthy, some academicians claim that it contributes to xenophobia even racism.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, there is a different and quite intriguing kind of fear. Authors and screenwriters do not hesitate to leave us petrified by employing unquestionably familiar objects such as dolls, clowns, or mirrors.

For instance, the fans of a beloved British TV show Doctor Who indubitably know how simple it is to make everyday things positively horrid. A person who watched at least one episode featuring Weeping Angels will never look at stone statues the same, something as boring as a crack in a wall turns into a portal to another dimension in their eyes, and even a Christmas tree or something living in the shadows could attack anytime.<sup>34</sup>

How come these familiar items have the power to affect us so intensely? Sigmund Freud focuses on this topic in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny (Das Unheimliche)*. The term can have two definitions, first meaning unhomely - unfamiliar, representing the first kind of fear, but at the same time, Freud suggests it is something concealed inside the home, which would fit the second kind of fear

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<sup>30</sup> ICD-10-CM Code F20.9 - Schizophrenia, unspecified. ICD Codes. Retrieved May 3, 2021, <https://icd.codes/icd10cm/F209>

<sup>31</sup> ICD-10-CM Code F44.81 - Dissociative identity disorder.

<sup>32</sup> ICD-10-CM Code F60.81 - Narcissistic personality disorder.

<sup>33</sup> Derrickson, T. (2001). *Race and the Gothic Monster: The Xenophobic Impulse of Louisa May Alcott's Taming a Tartar*. American Transcendental Quarterly, 15., p. 43

<sup>34</sup> Jeffery, M. (2018). *12 everyday things that Doctor Who tried to make us terrified of*. Digital Spy. <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/cult/a849413/doctor-who-monsters-aliens-villains/>



described above.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that the meaning of the uncanny and canny (unheimlich/heimlich) overlap. Not only does that make the word uncanny a contronym, it also serves Freud's theories finely. Apart from this apparent discord of the homely and unhomely, or the unhomely within the homely, Freud also pointed out the ever-present dread coming from darkness, the impossibility of seeing something reassuring or the impression that something you cannot see might be lurking.<sup>36</sup> It is generally known that the father of psychoanalysis deeply examined dreams, memories, the transformation of a child into an adult, sexuality, and repression. He also proposed that the child we once were remains within us, hidden underneath the rational, adult self. Thus, the uncanny resonates with the beliefs we used to have but concealed or repressed them as we matured in order to not be childish. In his premise, Freud asks what may be within us that horrifies us when it suddenly comes to light.

*"It may be true that the uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it.<sup>37</sup> [...] Let us take the uncanny associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, with the prompt fulfillment of wishes, with secret injurious powers and with the return of the dead. [...] Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have surmounted these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny..."<sup>38</sup>*

Freudian approach to literature is quite obsolete and questionable and should probably be reshaped for this century. At the same time, completely abandoning Freud and disregarding his ideas would not be the correct way to go either. His tremendous input into psychoanalysis provides great insight into the human psyche and the dynamics of fear. It also emphasises what fear tells us about ourselves.

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<sup>35</sup> Royle, N. (2003). *The Uncanny*. Manchester University Press. p. 108

<sup>36</sup> Royle, p. 110

<sup>37</sup> Freud, S. (1955). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (J. Strachey, ed.). The Hogarth Press. [https://uncanny.la.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/freud-uncanny\\_001.pdf](https://uncanny.la.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/freud-uncanny_001.pdf) p.245

<sup>38</sup> Freud, pp. 247-248

## 2 Liminality

This thesis would not be complete without addressing liminality. I suppose everybody who reads loves becoming immersed in the story and the authors can do something whimsical to make that experience even more exquisite. It has to do with our perception of reality and its limits. When we find ourselves attempting to cross the threshold and might feel somewhat trapped on the borders of a world we cannot understand, that is the moment perfectly utilized by the likes of Mitchell or Gaiman and many other great authors.

### 2.1 Types of Fantasy

According to Farah Mendlesohn we can distinguish four categories of fantasy: portal-quest, immersive, intrusion, and liminal.<sup>39</sup> All the categories deserve an explanation, but the liminal fantasy is to be explored in greater detail in this subchapter.

#### 2.1.1 Portal-Quest Fantasy

Typically, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The fantasy invites us in through any kind of portal, be it a rabbit hole, a wardrobe or a simple door. A "normal" protagonist from the real world enters a different world. What Mendlesohn points out as a critical attribute of this category with regard to exposition of the reader and the protagonists to the fantastic is the fact that they both get familiar with it together as the story progresses.

#### 2.1.2 Immersive Fantasy

Here I'd like to use *Wicked* the musical as an example to show the distinction. *The Wizard of Oz* is a standard Portal-Quest as well, but the Broadway retelling is entirely set in the land of Oz, making us arrive in the fantasy world and we ought to accept its prospective rules right away. There is no escape, we are, by definition, immersed in the fantasy.

#### 2.1.3 Intrusion Fantasy

With a little exaggeration, the fantastic jumps into the story and knocks everything over, like a proper intruder. Unlike the Portal-Quest transaction, the fantastic is the visitor here. It creeps in or leaps into the ordinary world and disrupts established course of things. Just like Mr. Wednesday (Odin) did from the perspective of Shadow Moon when their paths crossed (*American Gods*). He approached Shadow Moon just when he got out of prison and asked him to be his bodyguard. When

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<sup>39</sup> Mendlesohn, F. (2008). *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan University Press. Introduction. xix-xxiii

Shadow Moon accepted the job, little did he know he will wind up in the war of the old and new Gods, unwillingly become their pawn, and learn more about his own roots while on this strange journey.

#### 2.1.4 Liminal Fantasy

*A limen is a threshold between two spaces. If a border is viewed as the line, imaginary or real, which separates these two spaces, then the threshold is the opening which permits passages from one space to the other.*<sup>40</sup>

By default, liminal fantasy is the one where authors toy with our sense of realness the most, but that is not the defining aspect. The crucial characteristic ought to be the difference in interpretation and comprehension of the fantastic among readers and the characters approach to it.<sup>41</sup> When the fantasy and the ordinary meet in a frantic dance, amusing the readers but still keeping them at a distance, or when an opportunity to peek in between the cracks arises, that is when it becomes liminal.<sup>42</sup> We witness magical elements or simply aspects of a story that do not make sense with respect to the laws of our world, permeating and blending with the “real” in many types of fantasy, but here we truly need to focus on the position of the characters. Liminality is seen as the transitory stage, the uncertainty emerging from the unstable balance of metaphor and fantasy,<sup>43</sup> crossing “*the boundaries of the mundane as the mundane permeates the boundaries of the fantastic.*”<sup>44</sup>

A pivotal point in *Slade House* when the preselected visitors find themselves at the (non-existent) mercy of the sinister Atemporals is always the time when liminality is the most perceptible. And liminal fibers are interwoven practically in all of Gaiman’s work. The *Graveyard Book*, *Coraline* or again: *American Gods* to name a few. For instance, Nobody Owens, the protagonist of *The Graveyard Book*, is a boy who was virtually adopted by the graveyard when he was a baby. “*You were given the Freedom of the Graveyard, after all. While you are here, you can see in the darkness. You can walk some of the ways the living should not travel. The eyes of the living will slip from you.*”<sup>45</sup> The Freedom of the Graveyard makes him as liminal as the story gets, just in-between. Much in the same manner, Mitchell builds on a solid foundation of the real world penetrated by the fantastic.

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<sup>40</sup> Aguirre, M., & Sutton, P. (2000). *Margins and Thresholds: An Enquiry into the Concept of Liminality in Text Studies*. Gateway Press. p. 6

<sup>41</sup> Mendlesohn, p. 182

<sup>42</sup> Mendlesohn, p. 190

<sup>43</sup> Mendlesohn, p. 195

<sup>44</sup> Mendlesohn, p. 196

<sup>45</sup> Gaiman, N., & McKean, D. (2008). *The Graveyard Book*. HarperCollins e-books. p. 19

## 3 David Mitchell

### 3.1 Brief Biography

David Stephen Mitchell rose to fame when his third novel *Cloud Atlas* was made into a feature film in 2012. Mitchell, a contemporary writer and translator, was born in 1969 and grew up in Worcestershire, England. Having been a solitary boy with a stammer, he spent most of his childhood reading, and subsequently studied at the University of Kent where he obtained a Bachelor's degree in English and American literature and a Master's in comparative literature. Between 1994 and 2002 he was teaching English in Japan and that is where he got the inspiration for his primary works. He admitted being influenced by Haruki Murakami (among plenty of other writers), but although some similar themes can be noticed, the writing is entirely different. Despite his young age, even the early works were substantially sophisticated.<sup>46</sup>

After the "Japanese" years passed, he moved back to the United Kingdom and dedicated himself to writing full time. Mitchell believes that he would probably become a different kind of author, had he spent those eight years in London, Nairobi or Lima. Currently, Mitchell lives in Cork County with his wife, Keiko Yoshida, and two children. Their son is on the autism spectrum which makes certain situations in life considerably difficult. Autism embraces a broad range of symptoms such as speech disorders, deficient motor control, inappropriate social interactions, and learning difficulties. Mitchell and Yoshida worked together on translating an autobiography of a Japanese autistic boy, titled *The Reason I Jump: One Boy's Voice from the Silence of Autism*, which might have enabled them to understand the tangled diagnosis a little better.<sup>47</sup> The testimony has been appreciated as one of the best books on autism.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Augustyn, A. (2022). David Mitchell. In Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Mitchell>

<sup>47</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Mitchell>

<sup>48</sup> The Guardian. (2017). *David Mitchell: what my son's autism has taught me*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/08/david-mitchell-son-autism-diagnosis-advice>

### 3.2 Work of David Mitchell

David Mitchell has been active since the year 1999 and has produced various spectacular works. His ever-changing writing style could be considered rather experimental, and he never seems to settle for a single genre. For instance, in an interview about creating his most successful piece of writing, he stated that the process was along the lines of ‘What’ll happen if I try this?’<sup>49</sup> *Cloud Atlas* combines an epistolary novel worthy of the French realists, a clone dystopia, a memoir-novel of an elderly publisher, a thriller with an investigative journalist as a protagonist, a post-apocalyptic sci-fi and a historical novel in a form of a travel diary all wrapped up using a particularly unique fragmented structure. Following the success of the book, making *Cloud Atlas* into a hugely successful blockbuster is not a surprise at all, as it gives the creators a huge amount of material and an opportunity to play around. The movie was directed by the Wachowski sibling duo and knowing they are the minds behind *V for Vendetta*, *The Matrix* and *Sense8*<sup>50</sup>, one is probably right to expect an extraordinary and relatively complex plot.

Mitchell’s other notable books include *Ghostwritten*, a debut in which each chapter centres around a different character, but at the same time, they are all intertwined (an attribute of many of his stories), *The Bone Clocks*, six loosely connected sections following a woman with psychic abilities across her lifetime, *number9dream* and *Black Swan Green*. As of 2022, Mitchell’s latest, slightly psychedelic deed is *Utopia Avenue*.<sup>51</sup> Dr Marinus, a **Horologist**<sup>52</sup>, who in fact first appeared in *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*, plays a major role in the last chapter of *Slade House*. The nature of her persona is explained in said chapter, but *The Bone Clocks* provide better insight into the conflict between the **Anchorites (Soul Carnivores)** and the **Horologists**.<sup>53</sup> As is the case with well-known works, his books receive polarized critique and some readers believe that with all the genre-bending and connections he is only trying to seem a better writer than he actually is however, Mitchell’s books are preponderantly praised for an alluring style and their impressive complexity.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The Guardian. (2019). ‘What’ll happen if I try this?’: David Mitchell on writing *Cloud Atlas*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/21/david-mitchell-on-writing-cloud-atlas>

<sup>50</sup> Lana Wachowski. (2022). IMDb. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0905154/>

<sup>51</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Mitchell>

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 230

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell, D. (2015). *The Bone Clocks*. Sceptre. p. 408, 444-452

<sup>54</sup> Dillon, S. (ed.). (2011). *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*. Gylphi.

### 3.2.1 Interconnections in Mitchell's Books

The whole of Mitchell's oeuvre could be defined by sometimes bold and sometimes furtive interconnections. Themes, motifs, symbols, characters, and events overlap repeatedly, but none of his books is a part of a distinct series and there is no set reading order. However, the author was heard to state the following: "*There's something called The Marinus Trilogy in my head,*" [Mitchell] says. "*Jacob de Zoet is part one, The Bone Clocks is part two, and part three will be*"—I cannot in good conscience finish that sentence; it gives away too much about the current book."<sup>55</sup> It is more than obvious now, that the third book he mentioned was *Slade House* which was published in 2015. What else could Mitchell have in store for us?

One peculiarity Mitchell seems to enjoy excessively is almost haphazardly mentioning names that appear throughout his books. In many cases there is no apparent connection, in other cases, there is much more to it. When Holly talks about her Chinese psychiatrist Dr Marinus, she also mentions that before meeting him the only people of that ethnicity were those from a restaurant called Thousand Autumns<sup>56</sup> which is a hint at *The Thousand Autumns of JdZ*, though it might not be the most subtle one. Mitchell does this consistently, he connects a multitude of his pieces with hints or obvious "name dropping", often in an entirely different context. As the stories of *The Bone Clocks* and *Slade House* evolve, we get acquainted with a series of names of people, things, and places that leak from one to the other. I would like to elaborate on the links between these novels more in this part of my thesis and to do so I chose to delve deeper into *The Bone Clocks*.

A recurrent character most vital for this analysis would be that of Doctor Marinus who could be generally referred to by using a gender-neutral pronoun because as it is later revealed, Marinus is **an Atemporal** which means their soul is immortal and capable of living through multiple lives. The fifth section of *The Bone Clocks* facilitates the finest explanation of their reincarnations and personal history. When pertaining to a particular life of Marinus, a pronoun which they identify with will be used i.e., Iris Fenby is a she, Lucas Marinus is a he. She appears in *Slade House* as a heroine who cunningly kills Jonah Grayer, whereas, in *Thousand Summers of Jacob de Zoet* where the reader first gets acquainted with Marinus, he works as a doctor in Japan, and in *The Bone Clocks* Marinus is both, first a doctor who treated Holly because she thought she had been hallucinating.

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<sup>55</sup> Schulz, K. (2014). *Boundaries Are Conventions. And The Bone Clocks Author David Mitchell Transcends Them All*. Vulture. <https://www.vulture.com/2014/08/david-mitchell-interview-bone-clocks-cloud-atlas.html>

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, D. (2015). *The Bone Clocks*. Sceptre. p. 20

„After I slammed Vinny’s door my feet brought me here, round the back of the Gravesend General Hospital, where Dr Marinus got rid of Miss Constantin for me when I was seven years old.“<sup>57</sup> And then another incarnation: Dr Iris Marinus, the same one that defeated the Grayers in *Slade House*.

Miss Immaculée Constantin was no hallucination, she ranks very high among the Anchorites and is grooming people with the right **psychosoteric voltage** (analogous to the Engifted).<sup>58</sup> Marinus drained Holly’s voltage to make her unfit for the Anchorites. Anchorites subsequently recruited a man Holly had a short-lived affair with and continued their hunt when they assaulted Crispin Hershey or tracked down Ed Brubeck, Holly’s partner, with their daughter Aoife. All in pursuit of their rival Horologists. When teenage Holly runs away from home, she meets a woman who calls herself Esther Little and has a strange conversation with her sharing tea, then an intruder - Joseph Rhîmes, a soul carnivore who was hunting Esther and Marinus, attacks her in Heidi and Ian’s bungalow.<sup>59</sup>

*“Holly Sykes ...” He re-angles his head. “Yes, I know the name. One of those who got away. Using the brother as bait was clever, but look what you’re reduced to now, Horologist. Trying to hide in this slut-gashed bone clock. Xi Lo would shudder! Holokai would puke! If, of course, they were alive, which,” he sneers, “they are not, after your midnight raid went horribly, horribly awry. [...] Thanks to your Script, Horology is finished. This is a great day for Carnivores everywhere. Without Xi Lo and Holokai, what are you? A troupe of conjurers, mind readers, and spoon benders. So tell me before you die: Are you Marinus or Esther Little?”<sup>60</sup>*

This sinister monologue marginally introduces the reader to a lengthy ongoing conflict between two Atemporal factions, and as the novel unfolds each main character of their own section has something to do with the protagonist Holly and collides with Horologists or Anchorites at least once, but not much is revealed. Along the book, we put the pieces together and realize that both factions have distinct methods to outstretch their lives: *“carnivorous Atemporals - like the Anchorites consume the psychovoltaic souls of innocent people in order to fuel their own immortality”<sup>61</sup>* (which is exactly what the Grayer twins engage in too), and in their herbivorous ways Horologists only seek shelter in bodies nearing death – once a person dies, a soul of an Horologist can enter the body. That is what happened with Holly’s little brother Jacko. He was ill with meningitis and his family thought he recovered and survived, but he had not – a soul of Xi Lo, the oldest Horologist, lived in

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<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, D. (2015). *The Bone Clocks*. Sceptre. p. 15

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, p. 449

<sup>59</sup> Heidi and Ian were a couple who helped Holly and gave her a place to sleep. Rhîmes killed them.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, p. 59

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, p. 481

Jacko until he was abducted by Anchorites. “*Jacko was Jacko’s body,*” says Arkady, “*with Jacko’s habits of mind, but with Xi Lo’s soul and memories.*”<sup>62</sup> During Rhîmes’ attack, Marinus shortly inhabited Heidi’s body to save Holly. And Holly literally granted a hideaway (unknowingly) for the soul of Esther.<sup>63</sup>

In the table shown below, I tried to mark meaningful hyperlinks of Mitchell’s novels related to the events of *Slade House*. Besides the character names I decided to pick out other connections to different stories. Horologists, Anchorites and the Engifted have already been covered but there are hints as subtle as Sally (Oink Oink) wearing a jacket designed by Zizzi Hikaru, a model Eiji fantasized about in *number9dream* and who is referenced in An Orison of Sonmi-451 of *Cloud Atlas* which is also where we see the word Orison, or as coincident as the Spyglass, a magazine that Freya<sup>64</sup>, Ed Brubeck<sup>65</sup> and Luisa Rey<sup>66</sup> work for. Sally’s crush also mentions his mother transcribing a famous Crispin Hershey’s novel while Hershey narrates his own chapter in *The Bone Clocks*. An illusion of Rita Bishop tells Detective Edmonds that she dreamt about being carried away to Zedelghem by Vyvyan Ayrs, another straightforward reference to *Cloud Atlas*. In *You Dark Horse You* Freya records the interview in a pub called Fox and Hounds which is correspondingly a game Jonah wants to play with Nathan. Virtually the same game is described in *Black Swan Green* by Jason and Julia.

**Table 2:** Mitchell’s interconnections

NOVELS/ CONNECTIONS	Ghost- witten	number9 dream	Cloud Atlas	Black Swan Green	Thousand Autumns of JdZ	Bone Clocks	Slade House	Utopia Avenue
Carnivores					●	●	●	
Dr. Marinus					●	●	●	
Zizzi Hikaru		●	●				●	
R. Frobisher			●	●				●
Luisa Rey	●		●					●
Crispin Hershey						●		●
Chetwynd-Pitt family						●	●	
Penhaligon family					●	●	●	
Spyglass magazine			●			●	●	
Fox and Hounds				●			●	
Zedelghem			●				●	

Source: Vondrášková

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, D. (2015). *The Bone Clocks*. Sceptre. p. 451

<sup>63</sup> Mitchell, p. 484

<sup>64</sup> *Slade House*, *You Dark Horse You*

<sup>65</sup> *The Bone Clocks*, *The Wedding Bash*

<sup>66</sup> *Cloud Atlas*, *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*



## 4 Another Contemporary Representative of the Gothic Genre

Another current author who mostly writes in a particularly interesting way is Neil Gaiman, my personal favourite when it comes to thrilling and unusual stories. Gothic fiction has given us a plethora of incredible writers, but in connection with liminality, complex mythology, and unique characters, this specific storyteller comes to mind first.

### 4.1 Neil Gaiman

Neil Richard MacKinnon Gaiman is a prolific author originally from Hampshire, now mostly living in the vicinity of Minneapolis in the United States. Not only has he written *The Graveyard Book*, an unusual and surprisingly tender coming-of-age story, hauntingly beautiful *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, bewitching *Coraline*, mesmerizing *American Gods*, countless further novels, ordinary and extraordinary short stories compiled in *Trigger Warning*, *Smoke and Mirrors* and *Fragile Things*, but he is also the spiritual father of various exquisite comics with *The Sandman* probably being the most popular.<sup>67</sup> He has never settled for one genre or one media type and does deserve the recognition of an author “unbridled by the shackles of boundaries.”<sup>68</sup> Besides, Neil Gaiman has been awarded a copious amount of awards, as for instance, The Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, Locus Awards, and The Newbery and Carnegie Medals.<sup>69</sup>

Since *Slade House* was practically born on Twitter and Neil Gaiman also dabbles in “twitterature” it only feels right to include Gaiman’s Twitter account description as it aids me with demonstrating his nature and sense of humour. It states that “@neilhimsel will eventually grow up and get a real job. Until then, he will keep making things up and writing them down.”<sup>70</sup> I believe no more specification is needed, this and the stories he writes speak for themselves.

I fail to recall reading something in the scope of Mitchell’s Überbook, but for instance, interpretations of the **Triple Goddess** (the pagan archetype of the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone) can be spotted in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* represented by the Hempstocks and in *American Gods* as Zorya Vechernyaya, Zorya Utrennyaya, and Zorya Polunochnaya. The triune

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<sup>67</sup> British Council. (2022). *Neil Gaiman*. British Council Literature. <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/neil-gaiman>

<sup>68</sup> Sommers, J. M. (2016) *Critical Insights: Neil Gaiman*. Salem Press. p.8

<sup>69</sup> Neil Gaiman. (2021). About Neil. *Awards and Honors*. [https://www.neilgaiman.com/About\\_Neil/Awards\\_and\\_Honors](https://www.neilgaiman.com/About_Neil/Awards_and_Honors)

<sup>70</sup> Neil Gaiman. (2020). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/neilhimsel>

female resurfaces again in *The Sandman* in the form of the three witches, Mildred, Mordred, and Cynthia. There could also feasibly be a special affection for the Hempstock surname, because apart from Lettie in *The Ocean*, Bod befriends a witch, Liza Hempstock in *The Graveyard Book* and Daisy Hempstock was the name of Tristan's step-mother in *Stardust*.

## 4.2 Comparison of Mitchell's and Gaiman's Writing

In this subchapter, I would like to compare Mitchell's and Gaiman's writing styles. Although they certainly admire each other's coverage and have not cooperated much, they might recognize a bit of themselves in the other man's creation. While their pursuits can be comparable, the adventures they embark on vary.

What both have in common is an amazing ability to draw the reader in. The beautiful prose these two authors conjure is not the only magic at play, the gravity is enhanced by impeccable story setting and by the relatability of his characters. Gaiman engages artful humour in most of his works and combines it with dark and fearsome themes, David Mitchell does not initially write humorously but is more than capable of amusing the readers using irony or jocular comments of the characters.

It appears the two authors view genres as unnecessary labels and only prefer to visit them now and then just like playgrounds, they do not wish to be marketed as one brand only. The fantastic aspects give them unrestricted options. Neither shies away from the theme of immortality and they might actually find the idea, as well as its intricacies rather fascinating. David Mitchell engages with the topic chiefly through his dear phoenixlike Atemporals and eternal life ripples through Gaiman's work extensively, being a weighty force in *American Gods*, *The Sandman* and in multiple other books.

Gaiman's screenwriting contributions to *Doctor Who* are also worth mentioning in connection to recurring characters and time defiance. The Doctor is a time-travelling alien who if fatally injured regenerates into another humanlike form. Neil Gaiman is not the creator of Doctor Who, but he has authored a few short stories for inspired collections and provided the script for two newer episodes. Quite possibly, the eternal life of stories could also be taken into account, as both writers acknowledge the value of storytelling and relish earlier famed stories. The intertextuality is significant in both; they like to take the tales already told, toss and turn them, and come up with something completely new or if not new then embraced in a uniquely imaginative way, sometimes resulting in a few giggles, sometimes in fright or a deep thought.

Mitchell finds joy in developing his narrative through the voices of different protagonists (who might as well belong to different kinds of books) and naturally, different characters are popular with different readers. Therefore, this bold move of writing a polyphonic<sup>71</sup> novel lays out the opportunity for reaching greater readership, because it gives more people a chance to relate or see the issues from a whole other perspective.

Gaiman does not often write novels in which each chapter gets its own narrator, but the condition is easily fulfilled in short story collections, and just like Mitchell, he can miraculously alter his writing style as he sees fit for the occasion given. Both authors carefully craft relatable characters, mostly by making their lives, choices, and emotions understandable and for the most part realistic. Does Hugo Lamb<sup>72</sup> seem to be immoral, self-absorbed and not very good a friend? Is Sally Timms<sup>73</sup> insecure and dying for her love interest's attention? That too is a realistic description of human experience and something that inarguably deserves and requires its place in literature.

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<sup>71</sup> Mashable. (2014). *Discuss "The Bone Clocks" with Author David Mitchell*. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hw0oloUxnA&t=257s>

<sup>72</sup> The narrator of the second chapter of *The Bone Clocks*, a rather egoistic person who joins the Anchorites.

<sup>73</sup> The main character in the third chapter of *Slade House*, Grayers tricked her by creating illusions of her friends at a party.

## 5 Analysis of David Mitchell's Slade House

Quite surprisingly, *Slade House* came to life on Twitter. First, Mitchell wrote *The Right Sort* as an independent short story loosely connected to *The Bone Clocks*. Soon after, he decided to make what looks like a swift passion project and created a whole novel taking place in Slade Alley which emerges in a nine-year cycle and sort of serves as bait for special victims.

There are only five chapters, each narrated by a different character and set 9 years apart, with the first chapter opening in 1979 and the final one in 2015. As already suggested, reading *The Bone Clocks* before might be convenient since both novels are interlinked. Not being acquainted with **Horologists** and **Anchorites** before is not an issue and the story is perfectly comprehensible without it. Although, knowing suchlike important terms and the character of Marinus gives the reader a pleasant advantage when the story climaxes in the last two chapters.

While the chief focus of this thesis is an analysis of the gothic elements in the horror atmosphere, narrative technique of the novel (alternation of perspectives) and suspense gradation, as well as elements of fantasy will also be discussed, and that is why I have accentuated the liminal, which is, in my opinion, omnipresent throughout the story.

### 5.1 Summary of the Plot

An intricate, delightfully creepy thriller traversing five decades, from the late 1970s to the present, mixing a few genres together and drawing an unsuspecting reader into a remarkable world where a typical haunted house tale takes on a new dimension – sinister twins lure their chosen victims (**the Engifted**) inside and given they have enough energy, fabricating all sorts of realities when trying to trap the prey not only seems practical but they likely enjoy the torment too. Elaborating something so bizarre and ravishing at the same time is exactly what David Mitchell is good at. Veiled in a horror story, a criticism of humanity comes through, Mitchell accomplishes to address uneven distribution of power, ethical choices, feminism, grief versus hope, as well as the anxiety of aging.

What *Slade House* and *The Bone Clocks* have in common in composition except for the alternation of narrators is Mitchell's decision to explain most of the aspects and history of "**Atemporality**" – time/aging resistance in the penultimate section of the book. Before the explanation one can only assume how it works; the Grayer twins, and the cult of dark arts they are part of, found a way to defy time and either delay or overcome dying, but to do so they need to feed on the souls of specific

victims. They also possess impressive powers (or mostly learnt **psychosoterica**)<sup>74,75</sup> allowing them to fabricate elaborate illusions and read minds which enables them to communicate without talking.

## 5.2 Gothic Elements in Slade House

David Mitchell apparently prides himself in genre-bending, nevertheless, I suppose that Gothic is the most prominent of genres in *Slade House*. The popular symbol of the haunted house meets the haunted individual and jointly build an uncanny ambience. Specific Gothic elements and their prospective liminal features will be examined in this part of the analysis.

### 5.2.1 The Space of Slade House

The case of Slade House is exceptionally peculiar since the residence only appears every nine years and is sort of alive and trapped in time itself. Only an **Engifted**<sup>76</sup> person is capable of opening the door to the alley and entering a Victorian manor which, according to every passer-by they ask, is not there. The psychic twins created what they call a **Lacuna**<sup>77</sup> which enables them to not age and to conserve what was once their home. But to sustain their bodies and the Lacuna itself they need to capture the Engifted, trick them into consuming a substance named **banjax**<sup>78</sup>, and only after that, they can feed on their souls. Every single victim is pictured in the portraits along the stairs and there is a possibility that what is left of them remains inside the house. (Detective Edmonds hearing Nathan, Sally waking up next to a strange man who gave her a hairpin, Freya's soul being saved by Sally's sudden ambush...)

The physical space of Slade House as perceived by Nathan Bishop, Gordon Edmonds, and Sally Timms is a magnificent estate, "*a walled fortress in a sea of brick houses*"<sup>79</sup>, accessed through a small iron door inviting only the chosen in. Details are variable due to the fact that the Grayer twins are projecting tailor-made illusions each time. But nearly every victim encounters the grandfather clock, walks the stairs past the portraits, and ends up in a prison-like attic. The stairs and the pale door might symbolize a liminal threshold, a moment of doubt, loss of security. "*To my left's a*

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<sup>74</sup> Mitchell, D. (2015). *The Bone Clocks*. Sceptre. p. 194

<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 167

<sup>76</sup> Mitchell, p. 173

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, p. 135

<sup>78</sup> Mitchell, p. 174

<sup>79</sup> Mitchell, p. 170

*grandfather clock, to my right, stairs lead down to the hallway, and up ahead, more stairs climb past some pictures to a pale door at the top of the house where a soapy Chloe Chetwynd awaits her Knight in Shining Armor.*"<sup>80</sup> So far, these thoughts are carefree, but soon enough, Edmonds' mind will be forced to focus on the eeriness of Slade House and his dire situation.

Sally's older sister, Freya's experience is a little different because she is invited to a pub where she hopes to find out more about Sally's disappearance. The inside of the pub turns into a treacherous labyrinth as Freya tries to go down to see if there is a payphone she might use. She becomes more and more distraught because she is not able to comprehend it. *"By going down I went up. My brain insists this happened. My brain insists this can't have happened."*<sup>81</sup> She also hears an echo of her sister's last words *"Someone'll stop you one day you'll suffer you'll pay"*<sup>82</sup>, another unsettling factor she could not have understood.

Everything in that pub was a part of Jonah's act designed to make her ingest the banjax and trap her in the attic. That is where the Lacuna is, making it the most crucial place of the house<sup>83</sup> and withal, it is where the most unnatural things happen. The candle is burning, the victims are paralysed, but their minds are still very much alive, so they see and hear everything, and they hopelessly try to comprehend what is happening. Temporarily motionless Norah and Jonah take off their metaphorical masks, put on ancient robes and prepare for soul extraction<sup>84</sup>; sometimes they flaunt and sneer, but amidst the feelings of grandeur they are also heard arguing and the Lacuna appears to gradually falter.<sup>85</sup> Due to its decline the cracks in the house had let Freya's digital recorder fall out and thus be found by the Horologists. The recording of Jonah in Fred Pink's body exposing Grayers' complete history was the last clue needed to track the Carnivores down.<sup>86</sup>

Presuming the attic is the most critical place in Slade House, transforming the story into a traumatic final experience of each victim and at the same time, being central to the survival of the soul-eating twins, I would like to reference, how the first four victims crossed the threshold:

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<sup>80</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 68

<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, p. 181

<sup>82</sup> Mitchell, p. 138

<sup>83</sup> Mitchell, p. 173

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, p. 185

<sup>85</sup> Mitchell, pp. 136 - 137, 188

<sup>86</sup> Mitchell, p. 223

*„I’m in an attic, judging from the sloping ceiling and rafters. Are the Grayers prisoners like me? They look like the Midwich Cuckoos. Where’s Yehudi Menuhin, all the guests, the soirée? Where’s my mum?”*<sup>87</sup> Nathan whimpers, recognizing Jonah and Lady Grayer, watching the unmoving flame of a candle, unable to fathom his circumstances yet.

Seven years later, a detective was about to be caught too: *“But on the other side of the pale door, I find not a bathroom with Chloe in a shower, but a long dark attic. A long dark attic that’s some sort of ... prison? Yes. Three-quarters of it’s caged off by thick, sturdy bars, an inch thick and an inch apart. I can’t see how far back the attic goes ’cause it’s so dark.”*<sup>88</sup> This stream of thought shows gradual discomposure of the poor man and simultaneously, his report brings attention to the material character of the attic.

In Oink Oink, Sally initially thought she was experiencing a bad acid trip and wanted to find Todd who would keep an eye on her. *Behind him is the sloping ceiling of a dark attic. Todd uncouples himself from our hug and shuts the pale door. “Something bad’s happening in this house, Sal. We need to get out.”*<sup>89</sup> Posing as Sally’s crush was an obvious tactic manoeuvre and after she almost escaped, he pushed her back while seemingly desperately trying to find a way out.

Freya, panicked, seeks to call her girlfriend after receiving frantic messages indicating that Freya had been gone much longer than she thinks. But the phone does not cooperate and the pub starts to morph. *I turn to the stairs. The stairs are gone. There’s a pale door instead, with a worn gold doorknob. The landlady’s on the other side. She’s doing this. I don’t know how, but she’s doing this, and she’s inside my head. Or wait wait wait. [...] Reality folds in, origami-like, and darkens to black. I can’t feel my body but I’m kneeling, I think.*<sup>90</sup>

What ties all these descriptions together is the image of imprisonment and the question of sanity, the growing feeling of incertitude and dread. Such moment is essentially uncanny and will be complementarily assessed in the ultimate subsection.

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<sup>87</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre p. 33

<sup>88</sup> Mitchell, p. 71

<sup>89</sup> Mitchell, p. 126

<sup>90</sup> Mitchell, pp. 183, 185

### 5.2.2 Vampires

Gothic fiction tends to have some sort of an affinity for vampires and maybe it even gives them too much attention.<sup>91</sup> Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle described a vampire in a short story aptly named *The Parasite*.<sup>92</sup> The metaphor of a parasite – an organism living off others depicts their nature extremely well. Pedlar further states that they sustain themselves by “*absorbing other lives in order to indefinitely prolong [their] own.*”<sup>93</sup> Such interpretation denotes that the Grayer twins are in a rather integral way similar to vampires and therefore supports what I suggested in the subsection **Monsters**. The most tangible contrast is the fact that Norah and Jonah are not after blood, but souls, hence “soul vampires”.<sup>94</sup> An example reminiscent of the Grayer twins’ food strategy is that of Harriet Brandt from an older novel called *Blood of the Vampire*. Harriet is a psychic vampire who drains people’s energy, but what makes her significantly different from Nora is the fact that she does so unknowingly. I would also like to stress that the overt need for self-preservation probably indicates a metaphor for narcissism and might as well be criticising the act of exploiting others for one’s own good.

On top of that, vampires customarily assert sexual dominance or enchant their victim and then resort to possession<sup>95</sup>; an act that is most significant in the **Shining Armour** chapter as Norah shamelessly seduces detective inspector Edmonds. His ego is driven by the idea of being needed by a woman or saving her from danger. Norah takes on a guise of a widow Chloe Chetwynd who is not in danger, but her act of clueless vulnerable and desirable little thing works on him even though she becomes more assertive as their relationship evolves (vampires as a symbol of sexual dominance). In the denouement Norah even declares disdain for his primitivity. A legitimate trope of “damsel in distress”, on the other hand, is Rita Bishop’s allusion used to keep detective Edmonds in the attic. When Edmonds hesitantly walks up, he hears a boy’s voice trying to warn him. “*I’m not a lot*”, says the boy. “*I’m my own leftovers.*”<sup>96</sup> The first victim (in this book), Nathan, proceeds to tell him it is too late to save himself but asks him to try and warn the next visitor (that would be Sally in chapter Oink, Oink) soon enough. And he almost does. Sally talks to him as to a Mr Dressing Gown

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<sup>91</sup> Punter, p. 5

<sup>92</sup> Bloom, p. 65

<sup>93</sup> Pedlar, V. (2006). *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*. Liverpool University Press. p. 138

<sup>94</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 195

<sup>95</sup> Punter, p. 227

<sup>96</sup> Mitchell, p. 69



at the party. Their exchange is weird for her to say the least, but Edmonds manages to tell her he "*found...a...wea...pon...in...the...cracks.*"<sup>97</sup> Such present un-existence, the residue that tries its best to materialize and warn the next one, also underlines the liminal state of being.

I deem it important to highlight that in a horrifying final scene of the book after Jonah's demise, Norah manages to inhabit a foetus and survives, thereby triumphing as a female monster. *My mission makes me strong, and my mission is this: one day, however distant, I will whisper into Marinus's ear, "You killed my brother Jonah Grayer—and now I kill you." [...] Undetected, I pass through the mother's coat, her underclothes, her skin, her uterus wall; and now I'm home, my new, warm home, my anchorage...*<sup>98</sup> It is clear she wants to personally murder Marinus to avenge Jonah and at the same time, this chapter, told from the perspective of Norah, allows the reader to observe her more human side – she fully experiences regret, love, and grief. There is no continuation of Norah's story yet, so it remains up to our own imagination until the day Mitchell publishes a new book with Norah and Marinus clashing.

Despite the analogy of vampirism, Norah and Jonah have not died prior to their metamorphosis, their faces do reflect in mirrors, by no means are they restricted the way vampires are, and they obtained the longevity by a learnt craft (borderline black magic). This, again, intensifies the objective of liminal creatures caught between two levels of being: both monsters and humans.

### 5.2.3 Clocks, Mirrors, Portraits

Motives exhausted in a majority of Gothic fiction and of considerable relevance in Mitchell's *Slade House*. Apart from serving as devices inducing uneasy climate, they also show how powerful the magic surrounding (in fact, producing) Slade House is. The grandfather clock in Slade House is a mysterious symbol with mysterious phrases written inside. "*It has no hands. It's got words instead, on its old, pale-as-bone clock face, saying "TIME IS" and under that "TIME WAS" and under that "TIME IS NOT.*"<sup>99</sup>

The point when the characters encounter the portraits and recognize themselves shows utter confusion and a flutter of the uncanny and equivalently, the Grayers' conservation and camouflage mechanisms of portraying alternate self-forms correspond to the multifaceted quality of the liminal

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<sup>97</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 116

<sup>98</sup> Mitchell, p. 233

<sup>99</sup> Mitchell, p. 27

across the Gothic. That being said, I feel the portraits deserve the most attention.

The passage with Detective Edmonds hurrying up the stairs to share a shower with Chloe provides a good insight: *“Up I climb, two steps at a time. [...] The third portrait up from the landing’s of a boy of about thirteen. [...] It’s Nathan Bishop. It can’t be. It is. My heart’s juddering and I feel sick and a bit weightless. Nathan Bishop, as seen by Fred Pink in Slade Alley in 1979.”*<sup>100</sup> The most common reaction of all the victims-to-be is to doubt the clarity of their mind which is a characteristic psychological response – inexplicable situations make us reach for logical explanations and when there aren’t any, our brain automatically defends itself either by attributing it to conditions like being intoxicated or by blurring or erasing the memory.

The suspense grows as the detective becomes more agitated. *“I crawl backwards up the stairs, away from Nathan Bishop’s portrait, until my eyes lock onto the next one which I also recognize instantly ’cause it’s me [...] I gape at the more-real-than-real picture of Gordon Edmonds, in a brown furry dressing gown [...] I stare until I think: You should get out of this house. You don’t know what you’re dealing with.”*<sup>101</sup> The same way, Sally is overwhelmed with shock when she comes across a very current Sally in the same clothes who stares at her from a picture on the wall. On the other hand, Freya does not interact with the portraits because, as previously suggested, the trap set up for her included an illusion of a pub, not the house, and she is brought straight to the Lacuna.

Last, the mirror and its placement should not be overlooked. Not only does the mirror in the attic tell us that Jonah and Norah are not the conventional reflection-lacking vampires, it is yet another instrument increasing the fright of each victim, yielding an inescapable stage from which they must watch their death: *“The Nathan in the mirror’s gone, and if he’s gone, I’m—”*<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, a hopeless remark centering around the mirror is uttered in the final sentences of each chapter, and the mirror is the very last object Marinus shattered with the candlestick underlining and confirming the collapse of Slade House.

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<sup>100</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p.69

<sup>101</sup> Mitchell, pp. 69-70

<sup>102</sup> Mitchell, p. 36

## 5.2.4 Time

*“Krunk ... kronk ... krunk ... kronk goes the clock.”*<sup>103</sup>

The Lacuna as the carrier of the impossible should be immune to time, *“it’s always a few minutes after 11 p.m. on Saturday, 26 October, 1935.”*<sup>104</sup> But on top of that, time itself is very relevant to the story about survival and Atemporality. It can be considered an unstoppable partner of death, therefore an archenemy of the Grayers who are, I dare say, addicted to life. The callousness of time is affirmed in Norah’s upset remark: *“Jonah Grayer lived for over 42,000 days, but he died in a fractured second.”*<sup>105</sup> It is also time that would have killed Norah had she not found the anchorage in that foetus.

Moreover, time plays much more of a vicious role here, because the Grayers toy with it leaving their victims extremely confused. Trapped in Slade House, not knowing how many hours or days have passed since they entered, disconnected from the outside world. *“Missing? Five days? Since Saturday? It’s still Saturday! I’ve only been in Slade House for an hour.”*<sup>106</sup>

Atemporality has already been explained but what sets Marinus and the Grayers, and in parallel the Horologists and the Anchorites, apart is the course of their immortality. The process is completely involuntary for the Horologists, whereas the Grayers and any other member of the Anchorites deliberately choose to prey on the souls of the innocent. *“You murder for immortality,” states Marinus. “We are sentenced to it.”*<sup>107</sup> A view the Anchorites hold is that people subject to aging are simply inferior and maybe that gives the Carnivores the ‘right’ to kill them. In his threatening monologue (previously cited to outline the atemporal battles, p. 18), Rhîmes uses the moniker ‘**bone clock**’ which is a derogatory name for ordinary people whose lives are finite – ticking away. The exact same nickname is contemptuously spoken by Norah when she argues with Marinus.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 26

<sup>104</sup> Mitchell, p. 177

<sup>105</sup> Mitchell, p. 225

<sup>106</sup> Mitchell, p. 120

<sup>107</sup> Mitchell, p. 229

<sup>108</sup> Mitchell, p. 229

### 5.2.5 The Uncanny

The unhomely feeling is a loyal companion throughout most of the book, but we first start to feel it at the same moment Nathan Bishop does. It creeps in just after meeting Lady Grayer and her “son”, but Nathan attributes anything slightly not right (e.g., the mind-reading) to the Valium he took before. *“Its wings are like cellophane and Jonah says, “Its wings are like cellophane,” and I say, “I was just thinking that,” but Jonah says, “Just thinking what?” so maybe I just thought he’d said it. Valium rubs out speech marks and pops thought-bubbles. I’ve noticed it before.”*<sup>109</sup> They seemingly talk quite the way two young boys would and Nathan mentions his dad which is something that would later be used against him.<sup>110</sup> Admittedly, the desires and needs of each victim are repeatedly misused for better manipulation. The culmination of Nathan’s chapter may be the most shocking, as the reader first registers the dreadful circumstances and struggles to figure out why the day turned so much darker.

Nathan who feels Jonah might be a good friend continues the conversation: *“Do you ever think you might be a different species of human, knitted out of raw DNA in a laboratory like in The Island of Doctor Moreau, and then turned loose to see if you can pass yourself off as normal or not?” “My sister and I are a different species,” says Jonah, “but the experiment part is redundant. We pass ourselves off as normal, or anything we want to be. Do you want to play fox and hounds?”*<sup>111</sup> That is not uncanny per se, but it is when the truth is hinted at, even if neither Nathan nor the reader knows it yet. I reckon that the uncanny wraps and emphasizes all the gothic elements in this novel. Some of the elements, for example the portraits, induce the unhomely atmosphere, at other times, the uncanny supports the general eeriness of the situation or the space.

As a matter of fact, in the final scene of each chapter, the victims find themselves paralysed in a dark attic staring into a *“starless, bodiless, painless, timeless blackness.”*<sup>112</sup> *The shrunken attic’s black as inside a coffin deep inside a blocked-up cave. I’m kneeling, I’m paralyzed, and I don’t know what’s happening.”*<sup>113</sup> Attics alone are a standard trope in Gothic literature<sup>114</sup> – basements and attics are the most isolated part of isolated eerie mansions, and something is often hidden or hiding

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<sup>109</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 148

<sup>110</sup> To force the banjax into Nathan the Grayers orchestrate a dream about Christmas with his dad in Rhodesia.

<sup>111</sup> Mitchell, p. 20

<sup>112</sup> Mitchell, p. 133

<sup>113</sup> Mitchell, p. 76

<sup>114</sup> Punter, p. 279

in there. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* Mr Rochester kept his wife locked up in the attic of Thornfield Hall while he pursued another woman. Appalled by his own actions, Dorian puts his portrait in an attic and after some time also murders Basil on the same spot. In Slade House, an Engifted is about to be robbed of the gift they did not even know they possessed. The paralysis is a horrendous part of the process since losing the ability to move and therefore becoming helpless is among our oldest and recurring fears. *"My body's the cage now, and I'm the one locked in."*<sup>115</sup>

A mortified Engifted after Engifted ends up in this Lacuna, kneeling, subject to their deceivers. The inferior position and helplessness of the victims re-establishes how uneven they are in terms of power. Accentuating this, the Grayers' attitude is completely unlike their original feigned behaviour, and additionally it illustrates their true nature and the way they see their victims: a noticeable contempt over the mortals and their weaknesses. *"You've stopped breathing," Jonah tells me, matter-of-factly.*"<sup>116</sup> Or: *"As if you'd swap your metalife for a bone clock's snatched, wasted, tawdry handful of decades!"*<sup>117</sup>

The juxtaposition of the hunter and the prey is turned upside down in the very last chapter, narrated by Norah. Her brother was injured and is now reliant on her and the success of this year's hunt. Little did they know that the Engifted invited now is an Horologist capable of destroying them (and planning to). Interestingly enough, Marinus' unforgiving approach when she refuses to imbibe banjax and reveals her true identity to the Grayers leaves them frightened and out of place just like they used to leave their victims. There is no physical paralysis, apart from the partial one inflicted by Sally's hairpin. Jonah hastily attacked Marinus, but she redirected the 'pyroblast'<sup>118</sup> back at him, like a mirror. Seeing the justice and retribution in her intervention, Marinus shows no mercy even when grieving and now homeless Norah surrenders to acute aging when the Lacuna perishes.

Another factor of disconsolation, both for the reader and the victims is not dying properly<sup>119</sup>, being misplaced between two worlds, kind of obliged to copy the fate of the Grayers. But unlike the soul-devouring twins, they do not end up like that intentionally, their soul is stolen, and a mere residue is obliged to dwell within the premises of Slade House Lacuna. A fate reminiscent of earthbound ghosts.

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<sup>115</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 76

<sup>116</sup> Mitchell, p. 79

<sup>117</sup> Mitchell, p. 229

<sup>118</sup> Mitchell, p. 224

<sup>119</sup> Mitchell, p. 115

Considering all that, the faiths of Nathan, Edmonds, Sally, and any potential preceding visitor are intensely grim. First, they are all promised something comforting: being accepted, loved, finding what they are searching for. Not only are these expectations never truly fulfilled, the lured imaginably suffer more because of them. Such games are very unkind, but I personally find the Todd charades exceptionally cruel, another painful layer of betrayal for Sally.

The climax of *You Dark Horse* You was no less distressing. Initially, Freya thought she was only losing her time with a lunatic, at worst, but as she kept receiving irrationally urgent text messages, worries started to creep in, and when she wanted to leave, the indoors of the pub forged an incomprehensible maze. Then she completely lost control. „*Nightmare that can't be real, but which, nonetheless, is.*”<sup>120</sup> The chapter scored a slightly positive ending and foreshadowed a defeat of the Grayers. Although the twins seized Freya, the soul extraction was interrupted by Sally's strike. „*My body is dead but my soul is saved.*”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mitchell, D. (2016). *Slade House*. Sceptre. p. 188

<sup>121</sup> Mitchell, p. 190

## 6 Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to analyse David Mitchell's *Slade House* and the Gothic elements in it. The paper focused on the literary devices utilized in the aforesaid novel and explored them throughout the assessment. Selected ingredients of the Gothic were initially examined in the broad context of the genre and later more precisely analysed using the original text as a guideline along which they were demonstrated. The gradation of suspense and the alternation of narrators were not reviewed in a separate section devoted only to these aspects, but arguably enough attention was paid to them during the analysis.

The theoretical part consisted of four chapters. The first presented the Gothic literature and elements relevant to the story of *Slade House*. The second dealt with a condensed explanation of various types of fantasy and characterized liminality emphasizing the ambiguity of a transition, the blending of realities.

The two following chapters introduced inventive authors (David Mitchell and Neil Gaiman) who share a playful approach to fiction, with an exploration of Mitchell's interconnections and the comparison of Mitchell's and Gaiman's work embedded there. I pointed out that their genre-overlapping creations seem to follow similar subjects, but each of them handles the issues slightly differently. Then I tried to establish the most meaningful connections in Mitchell's oeuvre, a particularly alluring aspect of his work.

In the practical part, I assessed the elements of Gothic standing out in the novel: the curious space of Slade Alley, the parallel to vampirism visible in the novel's antagonists, the significance of everyday objects found in the house, and the potency of time which was viewed as the arch enemy of the Grayers. Concurrently, I commented on the liminal aspects of the story. The closing part of the thesis set out to capture the essence of The Uncanny in *Slade House*, noting that the concept is present in majority of Gothic literature and highly pronounced in the novel, with primary focus on the anxiety of attics, paralysis and the unknown.

Now, it is safe to say that Gothic fiction is distinctly appreciated, and the masterful combination of reality and fantasy executed by the likes of David Mitchell provides delight, reflection, and also brings a little bit of mystery into the prospective stiffness of adulthood.

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