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ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF SELECTED GOTHIC ELEMENTS
IN THE WORKS OF H. WALPOLE, E. A. POE, AND S. KING

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I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

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Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou a vývojem vybraných prvků gotické fikce napříč třemi stoletími v dílech Horace Walpolea, Edgara Allana Poea a Stephenha Kinga. Prostřednictvím komparativní analýzy textů *The Castle of Otranto*, “The Fall of the House of Usher” a *Pet Sematary* práce sleduje tematický vývoj klíčových gotických prvků, jako je prostředí, nadpřirozeno a smrt a klade si za cíl odhalit jejich společné rysy, přestože byla díla napsána v různých časových obdobích. Cílem práce je prokázat či vyvrátit, zda díla nesou společné rysy a rozdíly, zhodnotit, jak se analyzované prvky vyvíjely v gotickém žánru od 18. století po současnost a poukázat na jedinečné charakteristiky, které definují jednotlivá období gotické fikce.

Klíčová slova: gotická literatura; gotické prvky; prostředí; nadpřirozeno; smrt; Horace Walpole; Edgar Allan Poe; Stephen King

Annotation

The bachelor thesis delves into the analysis and development of selected elements of Gothic fiction across three centuries in the works of Horace Walpole, Edgar Allan Poe, and Stephen King. Through a comparative analysis of *The Castle of Otranto*, “The Fall of the House of Usher” and *Pet Sematary*, the thesis traces the thematic development of key Gothic elements such as setting, the supernatural and death and aims to reveal their commonalities, despite the works being written in different time periods. The aim of the thesis is to prove or disprove whether the works bear common features and differences, to evaluate how the analysed elements have evolved in the Gothic genre from the 18th century to the present day and to highlight the unique characteristics that define each era of Gothic fiction.

Key words: Gothic fiction; Gothic elements; setting; supernatural; death; Horace Walpole; Edgar Allan Poe; Stephen King

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Introduction

The enduring fascination with horror literature has captivated readers for generations, luring them into a world full of suspense, horror and the unknown. This interest stems from a variety of factors, including the exploration of innate fears and the intense emotional experience of reading that is brought by confronting the darker sides of humanity. As Gothic fiction has a rich history spanning centuries, evolving alongside cultural shifts and societal changes, this paper examines the development of key elements of the genre, focusing on the works of three influential authors: Horace Walpole in the 18th century, Edgar Allan Poe in the 19th century, and Stephen King in the 20th century. Based on selected texts, the themes of setting, the supernatural, and death are individually analysed.

The main objective of this thesis is to investigate whether common features exist among these works despite being written in different time periods. By analysing how these elements have evolved over time, the thesis aims to shed light on the trajectory of Gothic fiction from its inception to the present day. In addition, it seeks to demonstrate that not all themes hold equal importance in each period, highlighting the unique characteristics that define each era of Gothic literature.

Each chapter of this thesis focuses on one of the selected elements, beginning with the setting, progressing through the supernatural, and ending with the theme of death across *The Castle of Otranto*, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, and *Pet Sematary*. Individual chapters thus explore the works of Walpole as a pioneer of Gothic fiction through Poe to King, tracing the development of the thematic elements over time. Through comparative analysis, the similarities and differences between these authors’ approaches are explored and patterns of development within the genre are identified.

Given the nature of the thesis, Freud's concept of the uncanny is relevant as it is a recurring theme in Gothic literature, particularly in relation to death, the supernatural and the setting. In Gothic fiction it is often associated with the sublime, creating feelings of discomfort or eeriness that arise from something familiar yet strange or unsettling. Freud's theory of the uncanny "is especially relevant to the Gothic novel because it is not only a theory of the sublime but also, simultaneously, a theory of terror" (Morris 306-307), which is a byproduct of the analysed elements. The subject of Freud's theory of the uncanny is explored in the work "Gothic Sublimity" by David B. Morris and provides an important background containing germane information for this bachelor thesis.

1 The Setting

1.1 The Setting in *The Castle of Otranto*

The setting in which the Gothic novel takes place is considered one of the most important aspects of creating the right atmosphere in the 18th century Gothic. Medieval buildings such as castles, monasteries, etc. were typical for this period and represented the central element of the story. In the novel *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole, the title itself refers to the motif of the castle, which influences and dominates the entire narrative. It is important to note that “All of the action takes place either in or near the castle, and its layout is described with precision” (Clery xv). For this reason, the spaces of the castle and its surroundings evoke the feelings of darkness, mystery, and horror, which is essential to this genre. Walpole uses description of the castle spaces to draw readers into the plot, allowing them to become involved in the events that happen to the characters. The castle itself is characterised by countless dark and mysterious complex passageways, secret doorways and underground chambers that cause a sense of being lost and the feeling of helplessness. However, it is not only the description of the castle’s gloomy physical features that creates such an ambiance, but rather the perception of the surrounding conditions, including uncanny noises or, on the contrary, unbearable, agonizing silence. Such a blending of elements is expressed in the passage when Isabella is on the flight from Manfred, who tries to force her to marry him: “The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters: ... An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness” (Walpole 27).

The stifling atmosphere present throughout the whole novel is not only created by the interior of the castle but also by natural influences. The atmosphere of oppression generated by the place holds greater significance than mere physical immediacy. It underscores the characters' powerlessness, as they are manipulated by forces that they only vaguely understand (Clery xv). The phenomena like stormy nights, thunders, lightning or blowing wind intensify the sense of unease and reflect the precipitous events that are gradually revealed in the story. Their role is to create tension in escalating situations and to make the overall sorrows the characters go through more dramatic. The creation of suspense is a significant feature within the final scene when the plot itself escalates as Alfonso's spectre appears: "A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind" (Walpole 112). The rumbling of thunder thus enhances the whole scene and adds the necessary dynamism that accompanies it. In some cases, these natural elements even seem to be stubbing the characters in the back, trying to stop them in their path, on which they must overcome the difficult obstacles that fate prepared to them. Such an example is shown during Isabella's escape from Manfred: "... she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness" (28). With these situations are usually also connected the feelings of terror and anxiety that the characters experience. In this case, where the heroine finds herself in total darkness, even a small detail like the wind blowing out a lamp plays an important role. This allows Walpole to accurately reflect the protagonist's state of mind to awaken in the reader the same feelings that she experiences when she "for a considerable time remained in an agony of despair" (29).

Although the castle is the central motif of the story, it is difficult to find a detailed description of its actual appearance in the book. Marnieri mentions that "its parts are

frequently described as “the court”, “the steps” “the stairs”, “the window”, “the trap-door”, “the black tower” that may belong to any place, not necessarily to a castle, or to a Gothic castle, or even to Walpole’s Neo-gothic mansion” (46). One reason for this may be that Walpole wanted readers to create their own idea of the castle and not be bound by detailed descriptions that might inhibit their creative imaginations. It is important to note, however, that although the story takes place in or around the castle, the motif of the castle itself is only one piece of the puzzle that, with the other motifs, creates the overall atmosphere. Therefore, too much detailed description is unnecessary in this case and would distract the readers from the essence of the story. For example, When Manfred gathers the three knights into an inner chamber, he closes the door and asks them to sit down (Walpole 67), there are also no further, realistic, or concrete descriptions that depict furniture, structures, or styles. The architectural details are completely unclear, leading to a limited view of the scene. This limited sense of space creates an impression of claustrophobia and forces the reader to consistently experience the narrative from the restricted perspective of the characters (Marnieri 46). Moreover, Gothic fiction is not meant to describe the setting in detail, but to evoke feelings through an atmosphere that is created by something mysterious, something that is not revealed to the reader. Because fear and anxiety usually originate in something unknown that one cannot understand. Hence, in the book, the description of the castle becomes merely part of the situations that the characters experience: “It is the wind, said Matilda, whistling through the battlements in the tower above: you have heard it a thousand times” (Walpole 40). In this case, the element of windy weather is combined with the architecture of the castle, creating an overall impression of mystery and danger that shapes the situation.

Another key component of the setting in *The Castle of Otranto* is the location of the castle in the surrounding landscape. The castle is situated in the middle of a forest that

seems to encircle it, making it a remote place. The remoteness of the castle is meant to create a feeling of isolation and loneliness. The fact that the story takes place only in a limited space, which seems like one huge labyrinth, implies that “the claustrophobic confinement together with the constant rage of the protagonist, reproduce the repetitive movements of wild animals inside a cage” (Marnieri 50). The first direct mention of the castle’s surroundings is revealed after Matilda sends Theodore “behind that forest to the east, [where] is a chain of rocks, hollowed into a labyrinth of caverns that reach to the sea-coast” (Walpole 74). Interestingly, the sea and the coast are mentioned only once in the whole book, even though the real Otranto is built next to the sea (Marnieri 50). Walpole apparently did not want to evoke the idea of an existing castle and therefore preferred to place it in the middle of the forest, as mentioned above.

The central part of the story takes place in the forest and in the cave, where Isabella is secretly hiding from Manfred and where Theodor is fleeing from Manfred’s false accusations. When Theodor arrived, “he roved insensibly to the caves which had formerly served as a retreat to hermits” (Walpole 75). As with the vague description of the castle, the forest and cave are described in a very limited way, without any physical details that could help to get a better idea of the castle’s surroundings. In this case, Walpole again focuses more on the reader’s feelings evoked by the mystery, adding that the cave is “now reported round the country to be haunted by evil spirits” (75), rather than describing its size, hue, or shape.

1.2 The Setting in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

In the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” written by Edgar Allan Poe it is possible to notice at first glance the similarities with the setting in Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto*. The central motif here is again a building, in this case not a huge castle, but Roderick Usher’s mansion - The House of Usher, which influences and more importantly controls the whole narrative. The mysterious and heavy atmosphere is present from the very beginning of the story as the unnamed narrator passes the country “during the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens ... within view of the melancholy House of Usher” (Poe 3). Unlike Walpole, Poe uses mainly detailed perception of the objects and surroundings of the mansion to create the Gothic atmosphere, in this case from the narrator’s point of view. According to Tang Weisheng “in the eyes of the narrator, things around and in the House of Usher all seem mysterious and inscrutable, and infiltrated with a kind of evil power destructive to human beings” (4). Telling the story in the first person allows the reader to identify with the narrator and experience all his thoughts along with him. The atmosphere thus stems from the narrator’s observation and perception of the things around him, which produces a sense of terror and mystery.

Another aspect that shrouds the story in a cloud of darkness is the way the narrator describes the place in which he finds himself using words like “dark and intricate passages” (Poe 6), “the gloomy furniture” (19), etc. and the use of stormy weather which, on the one hand, simply intensifies the narrative, as in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, but on the other hand, the storm plays a big role in the part where the narrator reads the romance “Mad Trist” to frightened Roderick Usher. The narrator attributes “the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound” (Poe 22), which he heard and which was also described in the romance, to the “ordinary commingled

noises of the still increasing storm” (22), whereas for mentally ill Roderick the thunders and lightning in connection with uncanny and terrifying events in “Mad Trist” present, according to Walker, a sign of an upcoming disaster represented by Madeline’s rising from the grave and her subsequent attempt to destroy Roderick (591). However, it must be considered that Madeline does indeed appear on the doorstep later, and so it is uncertain whether the cause of the strange noises was really the storm, or whether the sounds were caused by Madeline fleeing the tomb, as Roderick claims that they “put her living in the tomb!” (Poe 24).

Unlike Walpole’s Otranto castle, The Usher mansion itself is described in detail, especially its architectural features, which is Poe’s way of emphasizing its importance as a central motif. However, as already mentioned, Poe also places great emphasis on the thorough description of the objects and surroundings of the mansion, which together form a complete unit that carries the essence of the whole story. The connection between the surrounding appearance of the mansion and its architectural elements is very creatively described in the passage where the narrator brings his horse to the steep edge of the black tarn and looks down “—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows” (Poe 4). From the narrator’s description, everything inanimate around him seems to have a life of its own. On the one hand, the empty windows that look like eyes are reminiscent of Roderick Usher’s distressed and deranged eyes as he struggles with his own mind. On the other hand, the gloomy appearance of the grey sedge and the ghastly tree-stems forewarn of the destruction that inevitably awaits the Usher line. According to Walker, “the black tarn is associated with imagery of desolation (grey sedge) and decay (rotting trees), as well as with the house itself, which, as the poem ‘The Haunted Palace’ makes quite clear, operates throughout as a symbol of

Roderick” (586). Furthermore, the symbol of the reflection of the mansion in the black tarn indicates that everything that happens in the Usher mansion is upside down and twisted, which again refers to Roderick Usher’s mental state and the strange atmosphere surrounding and consuming the narrator.

Another important setting element that contributes to the fall of the house of Usher is the correlation between the black tarn and “a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn” (Poe 6). It is interesting how these two elements affect the whole plot of the story, even though their role is rather inconspicuous at first. Moreover, the narrator mentions that “perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered” (6) the crack in the wall, which suggests that even the smallest setting details in Poe’s short story are important components that together form the overall essence of the narrative. Such a fractional element as a crack in the wall, which also symbolizes the impending breakdown of Roderick Usher’s deteriorating character (Walker 586), becomes one of the causes that lead to destruction of the house of Usher and their whole bloodline, as the narrator delineate how “this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder” (25). This is followed by the element of the black tarn, into which the entire Usher mansion along with the bodies of the dead Madeline and Roderick tumble down at the very end with “a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters” (25). Eventually, from the narrator’s point of view, “the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘House of Usher’” (25).

It is interesting that although the dark tarn is one of the most important elements in the whole story related to setting, it is not merely an element in a complex gothic décor.

Poe's approach to writing short stories was shaped by his conviction that a unity of form and effect is crucial, ensuring that every component in the narrative contributes to the *dénouement* (Walker 586), which refers to the conclusion of the story where everything is clarified and resolved. In this case, Poe managed to perfectly connect the motif of the black tarn with the plot from the very beginning, thus creating from a negligible component that is not even an official feature of the Gothic genre one of the most important elements which eventually dominates the climax of the story.

Nevertheless, the black tarn itself is not only the cause of the complete destruction of the Usher house, but it is also a major factor in Roderick's mental state, which seems to be getting worse every day and even influences the narrator's mind, when he claims that Roderick's "condition terrified—that it infected me" (Poe 18). One possible reason for this is the fact that the tarn evaporates dangerous substances that are slowly but surely robbing Roderick of his sanity as he has been living by the black tarn for many years and thus, he is exposed to these vapours continuously. Already at the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the tarn fumes as "a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued" (6), which indicates that dangerous substances harmful to human health may be present in it. Further evidence that dangerous substances are being released into the air from the tarn is evident when the narrator observes one night that "the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor ... were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation" (20). The fact that on a completely dark night the only thing visible is the light coming from the fumes points to the fact that the tarn responsible for the vapours is definitely not ordinary and hides something mysterious that negatively affects health of the people living in its close proximity. Even the narrator is convinced that the phenomena bewildering Roderick "have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn" (20) and

can therefore affect rational thinking and contribute to a distorted perception of the strange and supernatural events that take place in the story. Furthermore, at that time, it was widely believed and scientifically acknowledged that the source of physical and mental diseases was the odours and gases emanating from putrid water or decomposed substances and since Poe was interested in medicine and science, he was aware of the possible negative effects on human health (Walker 587-588).

As with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic setting in Poe's "The Fall of The House of Usher" is characterised by desolation and isolation from the outside world. Although there is no direct mention in the story that Usher's mansion is far from civilization, it can be detected from the feelings of the main characters. When the narrator arrives at the mansion at the beginning of the story, his mind is overwhelmed by the insufferable feeling "of the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible" (Poe 3), which together with the description of "the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn" (6) makes the mansion a deserted place. Living in both social and geographical isolation has taken its toll on Roderick and Madeline's mental state and physical health. Realizing that such isolation can be dangerous, Roderick thinks of a possible remedy and invites his boyhood friend to keep him company (Zimmerman 52). However, after a while the narrator notices that the self-isolation in which Roderick and Madeline live begins to affect him as well. In this case, Poe, like Walpole, did not try to describe the exact location of the mansion in detail, but he was able to portray the sense of desolation by the thorough description of the place itself, which seems cut off from the outside world and evokes claustrophobic feelings in the reader.

1.3 The Setting in *Pet Sematary*

Pet Sematary is a horror novel written by Stephen King and it follows the story of Louis Creed, who moves with his family to a small town in the country. The protagonist, Louis Creed, is a doctor who starts a new job at a university. He is a devoted husband and loving father, but over time it becomes clear that he tends to suppress his feelings and often cannot cope with loss. His wife, Rachel Creed, suffers from childhood trauma related to the death of her sister, and this experience influences her decision and behaviour throughout the story. The children, Ellie and Gage, are an integral part of the family. Ellie is a sensible and understanding girl who struggles to understand the complexities of the adult world, while Gage is a small and innocent boy who becomes a victim of an accident on the road in front of the Creeds' house. Another important character, the neighbour Jud Crandall, who becomes a guide and mentor to Louis's family, is an older man with years of experience and wisdom. Jud leads Louis to the Pet Sematary, an ancient animal graveyard that becomes a key element of the plot.

Considering the central motif of the novel, it is the Creeds' home where a significant part of the story takes place as it becomes a refuge for the main characters. Unlike previous works by Walpole and Poe, it is no longer a huge castle full of tangled passages or an opulent mansion, but a family house that is meant to serve as protection from the outside world where dangerous and strange things are present. Even though the Creed family house may seem perfect and cozy at first, "the home itself occupies a slightly strange place in the narrative. It is at once the most important object of attention in the novel and something that stands out with total comprehension" (Corstorphine 92). In contrast to *The Castle of Otranto* and "The Fall of the House of Usher", however, the Creeds' house itself does not have any special uncanny characteristics that would evoke a bad feeling. Rather, it is more about the environment in which the house is located.

Because of this, the characters naturally begin to associate unpleasant feelings stemming from the surrounding area of their home with the house itself. Already at the beginning of the novel, there is a hint that life in this house will not be a walk in the park, when Ellie asks at the first sight of the building: "Is this home?" (King 5). Moreover, this idea aligns well also with Louis's character as he navigates through an unfamiliar and surprising environment. The assurance of safety that he anticipates is nullified, creating a sense of fear. While a home is typically seen as a refuge, in this case, it transforms into an entry point for terror (Corstorphine 92). Proof of the Creeds' house's inability to fend off the supernatural and protect the family from what lurks outside can be seen when Louis wakes up in the middle of the night and sees a patient who died the day before at his clinic: "Then the moon sailed out from behind a cloud, flooding the room with cold white light, and he saw Victor Pascow standing in the doorway" (King 84). However, Pascow only tries to warn Louis about the powerful force of the Micmac burial ground located behind the deadfall near the Pet Sematary, which is inadvisable to play with: "Don't go beyond, no matter how much you feel you need to, Doctor. The barrier was not made to be broken. Remember this: there is more power here than you know" (88). After such an encounter, Louis finds the house even more unsettling. Although the strange feeling leaves Louis for a while on Christmas Eve, when he admits that the house "had never seemed more like home" (203), he still cannot shake the thought that the house in North Ludlow had seemed so "strange and even hostile, what with Ellie cutting herself out back and Gage getting stung by a bee at almost the same time" (203). Therefore, the feeling the house creates in the characters can be compared to the feelings experienced by Roderick Usher and the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher" as both protagonists try to figure out the real reason why the house has an unpleasant and disturbing effect on them. However, it cannot be claimed that the Creeds' house or Roderick's mansion itself

negatively affect the characters. It is primarily about how the environment in which the buildings are located influences all of them. While the Creeds' house may seem like a safe place to protect the family from the outside world, like Roderick's mansion, it "becomes a symbolic gateway to chaos, portrayed here as the return of tribal forces that are at the same time supernatural and supremely natural" (Corstorphine 93).

The Creeds' family house is in a place that is situated between two contrasting worlds: a natural forest wilderness on one side and the encroaching dangers of modern life on the other. It is the question of the problems of modern life and the outfalls associated with it in the world that represent a shift from previously analysed works, which do not deal with such topics to such extent as *Pet Sematary*. Practically, in *Pet Sematary* this modern threat manifests itself as the physical risk arising from the heavy traffic typical of American capitalism. Behind their house, in the woods, there is an area that has been used for a long time by the nearby community as a burial ground for pets, a necessity due to the high number of domestic animals that meet their end on the busy road (Mercer 134). This road – Route 15, which is located just between Louis's and Jud's houses, becomes another untypical but important element in the setting of King's *Pet Sematary*. Because of its dangerousness, the road contributes to the creation of feelings of fear and terror, which, in conjunction with the other traps around the Creeds' house, create a Gothic atmosphere and shape the entire story. When Jud meets his new neighbours at the beginning of the book, he remarks: "You just want to watch 'em around the road, Missus Creed. Lots of big trucks on that road" (King 11). The problem is that despite all the warnings and efforts to avoid a tragedy, the road in front of the house will eventually claim victims. First victim is Ellie's beloved cat Church, even though the neutering was supposed to prevent it, as Jud states: "A fixed cat don't tend to wander as much" (21). After a while, the second victim is Gage, the Creeds' son, who runs right into

the wheels of a truck when he thinks he is playing tag with his parents. But what is interesting are the circumstances of this tragic accident. It is later revealed that the truck driver was not under any influence of intoxicants, but “he said that when he got to Ludlow, he just felt like putting the pedal to the metal. He said he didn’t even know why” (329). This gives direct evidence that the place where the Creed family lives is not an ordinary one, but rather dangerous, as the surroundings of the house, including the road, influence characters’ thoughts and behaviour. Even Rachel herself admits that “the place has a power, ... it’s been full of power before, and I’m ascaresd it’s coming round to full again” (328).

Like the “Fall of the House of Usher” and *The Castle of Otranto*, the Creeds’ family home is situated in the middle of the wilderness, away from civilization, again creating a sense of isolation and desolation. Unlike, for example, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, the isolation from civilization does not take much of a toll on the characters. Here, what plays an important role is what happens around them and how it affects their mental state. A great contrast with the previous works can also be seen in the fact that the most crucial events of the story take place just outside the house, in the woods beyond the mysterious deadfall that separates the pet cemetery from the Micmac burial ground, thanks to which Louis is able to bring Church, Gage and eventually Rachel back to life. In this case it is the forces of the Micmac burial ground that like the road in front of Creeds’ house shapes the Gothic atmosphere and its mystery and evokes a sense of danger and intrigue. This idea of forbidden knowledge of places is a fundamental element of Gothic literature and creates an unsettling and ghostly atmosphere. The way the setting of the burial ground is described also contributes to the uncomfortable feelings. The characters again venture into dangerous place at night by the dim but adequate starlight (King 143), where everything around them formed “dark shapes” (144) and “the whole effect of this high,

lonely place was emptiness – but an emptiness which vibrated” (144). Such a description evokes a sense of loneliness and sublimity and therefore confirms Freud’s idea that the uncanny evokes fear not because it is external, foreign, or unfamiliar, but rather because of its strange familiarity that undermines our attempts to distance ourselves from it (Morris 307).

Pet Sematary not only explores the uncanny power of the Micmac burial place, but it also delves into the theme of American colonization. In contrast to previously mentioned works, King incorporated political themes in the book, which are based on real events. At the beginning of *Pet Sematary*, readers discover that Micmac tribe’s remnants are in a legal dispute with the U.S. Government over who rightfully owns the woods in Ludlow, Maine, where Louis Creed recently bought a house, which presents a narrative that demonizes indigenous people, potentially undermining their land rights claims (Nazare 32). Therefore, the element of “home” or a safe place, which was denied to the native inhabitants due to the occupation of the land by the Americans, is repeated here as Jud tells Louis that “later on, not even Micmacs themselves would come here. One of them claimed he saw a Wendigo here, and that the ground went sour” (King 147). While not directly stated, the novel suggests that the land went sour around the time of European colonisation, implying that this “bad place” is a result of European settlers’ influence (Corstorphine 91). It means that the power the Micmac burial ground has can be blamed on the modern life of Americans who deprived the natives of their home and as a result, the ominous impact of the Micmac burial ground extends its ancient and malevolent spiritual influence over the surroundings of Ludlow, Maine (Hogle, Bruhm 271).

2 The Supernatural Phenomena

2.1 The Supernatural in *The Castle of Otranto*

The supernatural phenomena in Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* is one of the most crucial elements which literally controls the whole story and influences the behaviour and actions of the main characters. It is important to note that the unaccountable appearances of ghosts, giants and paranormal incidents evoke a sense of terror and fear in the reader and can therefore be classified under the theory of the sublime. "Gothic sublimity in *The Castle of Otranto* thus belongs to Walpole's conscious protest against the Richardsonian model in fiction, with its realist techniques of narrative and its bourgeois attitudes toward marriage and social relations" (Morris 301). In contrast to the fact that the story also deals with classic issues of everyday life, such as marriage, inheritance, and relationships, which are precisely the realistic features of the narrative, Walpole claims that by linking the unearthly with nature and probability, he is trying to fit the story into an existing literary theory (Clery xxiv) and therefore only partially opposes the Age of Reason in literature. In conjunction with the illogical explanation of the phenomena, Manfred's reaction at the very beginning of the story, when he accuses Theodore that "he has stolen the helmet from good Alfonso's tomb, and dashed out brains of our young prince with it" (Walpole 21), is remarkable. Even though it was impossible "for a youth, seemingly not twenty, to wield a piece of armour of so prodigious a weight" (21), Manfred does not care how illogical his judgement is and stands his ground, which seems to mock the Age of Reason and confirms the fact that Walpole departs from logic and traditional explanation not only on the level of supernatural, but also in the actions of the characters.

Even though Gothic fiction usually explores and oscillates between earthly everyday reality and the potential spheres of the supernatural, such stories often end up

leaning towards one of these realms, or even cross the boundaries between them, whether psychologically, physically, or both (Hogle 2-3). In the case of *The Castle of Otranto*, it seems that the supernatural side of the story has swallowed up all earthly laws, as the characters act as the divine forces dictate their journey through life. In this sense, Manfred, Prince of Otranto, is the most susceptible to this supernatural control, and despite his stubborn and strong-willed nature, he finds himself in situations that prevent him from achieving his goals and point him in a different direction. The first sign that higher forces are interfering with Manfred's actions can be seen in the first chapter, when Manfred tries to seize Isabella and force her into marriage. After the portrait of Manfred's grandfather hanging on the wall "uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast" (Walpole 26), Manfred was unable to take his eyes off the painting, giving Isabella time to escape. Even though Manfred was "full of anxiety and horror" (26), he momentarily forgot his intentions with Isabella and followed the spectre, which eventually entered the chamber, whose "door was clapped-to with violence by an invisible hand" (26). Such phenomenon, then, suggests that Manfred is losing control of himself, and his mind seems to be influenced by something he cannot resist.

Moreover, whenever Manfred witnesses a supernatural phenomenon, he begins to reflect on his behaviour and actions and seems to regret the way he treats others, like in the case of the princess Isabella chase, which made him feel "ashamed too of his inhuman treatment of princess" (Walpole 38). This is proof that supernatural forces not only determine the direction his actions take, but even control his conscience and make him reflect on his actions and therefore "the frustration of Manfred's "impious intentions" is effected by supernatural rather than natural agency" (Andriopoulos 740). However, such states only last for a while and soon he returns to his typical selfish behaviour as "the next transition of his soul was to exquisite villainy" (Walpole 38).

However, it is not only Manfred who is affected by the supernatural, but also the other characters who escape the fate that Manfred has destined for them. As in the aforementioned passage where Isabella was able to escape from Manfred thanks to the spectre from painting, Theodor is spared execution at the end of the second chapter thanks to higher powers as “the sable plumes on the enchanted helmet ... were tempestuously agitated, and nodded thrice, as if bowed by some invisible wearer” (Walpole 59), which together with the “trampling of horses ... [and the sound of] a brazen trumpet” (58), distracted Manfred and saved Theodore from certain death. Moreover, shortly after this event, the terrified Manfred’s conscience begins to gnaw at him again and he begins to reflect on his actions. It is evident that these unexplained phenomena have a great influence on Manfred, which is reflected in his self-pity, as he says: “Unhappy prince that I am! cried Manfred – Holy Father! will you not assist me with your prayers?” (60).

Another important element that occurs along with supernatural phenomena in the story is repetition. It is noticeable that most of the supernatural events have a kind of common pattern that appears repeatedly and thus contributes to the creation of the Gothic atmosphere. Since the uncanny makes use of its unsettling power by presenting us with an aspect of ourselves that we have rejected and refused to acknowledge, but which remains ingrained in us and cannot be completely erased or avoided, repetitiveness becomes the basic structure of the supernatural (Morris 307). Whenever something supernatural happens, it is almost certain to happen again. In *The Castle of Otranto*, the most important recurring motif becomes the giant in armour, with the reader witnessing supernatural phenomena as parts of his body and armour are gradually revealed. Nevertheless, his apparitions are also connected with the feelings of terror and horror of the characters who encounter him, and the element of repetition applies to these feelings as well. Starting from “an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque

ever made for human being” (Walpole 19), which unexpectedly causes young Conrad’s death in the court where “the company were struck with terror and amazement” (18). This scene takes place immediately at the beginning of the story, thereby sets off a sequence of events that the main characters must face and creates a gloomy atmosphere, which accompanies the whole narrative. The unearthly figure of the giant in armour appears again in the scene where Manfred’s servants Jaquez and Diego search the bowels of the castle for escaped Isabella. Here, the supernatural is witnessed by scared-to-death Diego, whose “hair stood on end” (35) in terror. He says: “It is a giant, I believe; he is all clad in armour, for I saw his foot and part of his leg, and they are as large as the helmet below in the court” (35). Therefore, the characters notice a certain connection to previous phenomena they have witnessed and start to realize that it could be a giant to whom the huge helmet in the court belongs. The repetition of the supernatural continues later when Bianca, the servant of Hippolita, saw “the hand! the giant! the hand!” (102), which reveals another part of the giant’s body. And again, the characters’ feelings that overwhelmed them during the encounter with the uncanny creature are also repeated, as Bianca cries: “I am terrified of my senses” (102). No exception is also the retrospective view on Diego’s previous experience with the giant, as “’tis the same hand that he saw the foot to in the gallery-chamber” (102). In relation to the repetition of supernatural elements in *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic novel recalls things that are well known but at the same time seem strange and difficult to understand. Through repetition like this, then, the Gothic supernatural forces people to confront things they would rather ignore or deny and brings them back into their awareness (Morris 310).

It is also worth mentioning that it is the repetition of these supernatural phenomena which gradually leaves clues that come together only at the end of the book. All the parts then form the denouement of the story, which would not make such sense without these

repeated uncanny elements. It is “the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude” (Walpole 112) who appears at the end of the story to reveal the true heir of Otranto – Theodore. Even though Walpole does not assert that his planned authorial direction was superseded by his vision of a “gigantic hand in armour”, instead, he started writing without knowing what he intended to say. This depiction of a “gigantic hand in armour”, which is a symbol of the invisible giant Alfonso, transforms into the embodiment of the “hand of providence” within Walpole’s narrative (Andriopoulos 751).

2.2 The Supernatural in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

At first glance, it is obvious that the supernatural phenomena in Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” is heading in a very different direction from Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto*. The biggest difference is the absence of any uncanny creatures like ghosts and giants typical for *The Castle of Otranto*, which affect the main characters and cause terror and fear. In the case of “The Fall of the House of Usher”, the supernatural is based on the inexplicable psychic and supernatural forces affecting the emotions of the narrator and the mental state of Roderick Usher, which become an essential element in creating Gothic atmosphere and terror in the readers. However, these influences remain ambiguous and undefined, as already said, with no apparitions of ghosts. Undoubtedly, Poe as a skilled storyteller, intended for the narrative to evoke an eerie dread of an obscure and mysterious origin, leaves much to be speculated (Bailey 445). Hence, the main pillar for the creation of terror in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is what happens in the mind of the person, not supernatural beings who usually manage to induce fear in the characters just by being in their presence. Poe focuses on a much more elaborate and darker side of the supernatural that many readers may find more frightening, as it affects everyone and there is no escape from it. Poe’s critics, however, were not impressed with what they saw as the “German” theme in “The Fall of the House of Usher”. They doubted whether tales filled with wild, improbable, and frightening elements considered as “German” could ever gain lasting popularity in America (Walker 585). Although the reader encounters supernatural elements in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, for Poe the story does not provide a means of departing from reason and rational thought, as in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. Poe claims that “the terror he wrote about was not fantastic or “German”, but realistic and based upon true principles of human nature and conduct” (585).

The first important thing to note in connection with Poe's use of the supernatural is the style in which the story is told. It is conceived from the first-person point of view of the narrator, which allows the reader to see into his mind and experience what he is going through. From the very beginning, the narrator is overwhelmed by inexplicable feeling at the sight of the Usher mansion: "I know not how it was-but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit" (Poe 3). Poe, however, created a narrator who "was a rationalist and a sceptic regarding the supernatural—a man who habitually dismissed any explanation not in accord with commonplace fact" (Bailey 445) and thus the narrator approaches all strange things and feelings rationally and is able (at least at first) to explain them with his own judgement. Even though the atmosphere around the mansion makes him feel uncomfortable and peculiar, he reassures himself that "beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us" (Poe 3-4), but at the same time, he is aware that behind these ordinary objects there is something which man cannot comprehend, since "the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth" (3-4).

The narrator thinks the same way about the disease that Roderick Usher supposedly suffers from. Again, he takes a rational approach to Roderick's condition and tries to find its cause in the natural things that surround him. He believes that the disease afflicting Roderick is "an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought upon the *morale* of his existence" (Poe 10). Since the narrator finds Roderick's "peculiar physical confirmation and temperament" (8-9) too strange and abnormal to be the result of any illness, he likens his behaviour to that of "the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement" (9), even though there is not a

single reference in the story of Roderick's consumption of alcohol or any other narcotic. As the narrator still does not believe that Roderick's illness could be rooted in things incomprehensible to man and stands by his opinion that accepts only things that can be rationally explained, he even labels Roderick as "the hypochondriac" (12) who makes up "phantasmagoric conceptions" (12) that are robbing him of his mental health.

What is interesting, however, is how the narrator's mental stability and rational approach to the world begins gradually change in the presence of Roderick and in the overall environment of the mansion and its surroundings. His first encounter with Roderick's sister Madeline, who, like her brother, suffers from an unexplained illness that "had long baffled the skill of her physicians" (Poe 11), could be seen as a turning point in the narrator's thinking about the possible presence of the supernatural. Even though the narrator does not have the opportunity to talk to Madeline, her mere presence, when she flickers through the room and disappears, evokes feelings he cannot explain and for which he has no justification: "I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread; and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings" (10). After Madeline dies and Roderick and the narrator bury her, Roderick's condition begins to deteriorate rapidly, which significantly affects the narrator himself. His once detached and rational dispositions mostly vanish as his mind becomes increasingly influenced by Roderick's delusional fantasies (Walker 590). The narrator thus finds himself on the edge of what feels real and what does not, struggling with feeling he has not encountered before and gripped by the fear of not being able to cope with himself: "It was no wonder that his condition terrified—that it infected me. I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degree, the wild influences of his own fantastic and yet impressive superstitions" (Poe 18). These feelings plaguing the narrator reach a peak on the last night when the Usher's downfall occurs. He can sense that something is wrong: "I experienced the full power of

such feeling. Sleep came not near my couch—while the hours waned and waned away” (19). Even though he tries to reassure himself that his condition “was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy furniture of the room” (19), he cannot shake the disturbing thoughts, adding that his “efforts were fruitless” (19). His ignorance of the supernatural influences, that eventually engulf both Roderick and him, catches up with the narrator at the very end of the story, when buried lady Madeline appears on the doorstep. Interestingly, although Roderick shows signs of being insane throughout the story, and the narrator displays a resistance to any supernatural phenomena due to his logical mindset towards the unknown, it is ultimately the narrator who is labelled by Roderick as “madman” (24), which only confirms that the narrator was blinded by his rational thoughts and thus overlooked most of the warnings that Roderick was trying to expose to him.

Another supernatural element, which can be likened to the final scene in *The Castle of Otranto*, when the spectre of Alfonso appears, is the arrival of lady Madeline at the end of the story. Nevertheless, in “The Fall of the House of Usher” the question arises whether the scene is really a supernatural phenomenon, or whether the whole situation takes place only in the delusional minds of the main protagonists of the story – Roderick and the narrator. Initially, Madeline’s emergence from the tomb appears genuine, supported by the narrator’s convincing and dramatic retelling. However, upon closer examination, doubts arise regarding the authenticity of the entire event (Walker 590-591). If this scene is approached rationally, it is almost certainly unlikely that on the “seventh or eighth day after the placing of the lady Madeline within the donjon” (Poe 19) she would have been able to escape alive. This argument is also supported by the fact that the building in which Madeline was buried was “carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an

unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges” (17), which makes it impossible for an ordinary person to get out. Thus, there is the possibility that the apparition of Roderick’s sister Madeline presents elements of the supernatural, not in the paranormal sense, but in the psychological one, which stems from the adverse long-term effects of the mansion and its surroundings on the minds of Roderick and the narrator. Such a concept of the supernatural represents therefore a significant contrast to *The Castle of Otranto*, which uses supernatural apparitions to create terror in the reader without any deeper psychological analysis of the main characters.

2.3 The Supernatural in *Pet Sematary*

In King's novel *Pet Sematary*, in contrast to the works of Walpole and Poe, the author deals with supernatural phenomena in greater depth and thus expands the classic features of the supernatural that have been used in the horror genre so far. However, it does not mean that typical uncanny elements, such as ghost or phantoms, which influence human perception and affect the individual mind and behaviour do not appear in *Pet Sematary*. Rather, it is a combination of already existing Gothic elements with new ones, which gives Postmodern Gothic a new direction. At the same time, it is important to note that *Pet Sematary* leans more towards the supernatural in the sense of psychological analysis of the characters in connection with terror, which in this case does not stem only from unearthly beings, but also from the complexity of the human mind and its susceptibility to surrounding dangers. Therefore, the horror of *Pet Sematary* is not primarily about supernatural beings like zombies and demons, but rather about the actions individuals might be compelled to take due to their personal desires within the context of modern society (Mercer 144). In connection with this concept of the supernatural, there is a noticeable similarity with Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", stemming from the way the main characters approach and deal with uncanny phenomena.

There is a considerable resemblance between Louis Creed's reasoning and the reflections of the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher". Like him, Louis initially meets the supernatural occurrences with scepticism and a rational mindset. Being a doctor, he typically seeks scientific explanations for phenomena beyond his immediate comprehension. For instance, in the episode where a badly injured patient, Pascow, is brought to the clinic after being hit by a car while running, Louis does not want to believe what he tells him just before he dies. He directly addresses Louis by his name and warns him against approaching Pet Sematary. Louis reacts to this eerie interaction with terror,

attempting to dismiss it as a hallucination rather than acknowledging its reality. Being a systematic individual with little faith in religion or superstition, Louis finds himself unprepared to comprehend the strangeness of a dying stranger knowing intimate details about him (Mercer 136). Another thing that is reminiscent of the narrator's behaviour in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is Louis's approach to the appearance of the dead Pascow in his bedroom the night after he died at the clinic. Louis tries to convince himself that what he sees is not real: "*It's a dream*, he thought, and it was only in his relief that he realized he had been frightened after all. *The dead do not return; it is physiologically impossible*" (King 84). Nevertheless, as the narrative unfolds and confronts increasingly unsettling events, his rationality wavers, as it does for the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher", and he becomes more open to considering supernatural possibilities. He begins to accept the reality of supernatural events as he witnesses disturbing and inexplicable incidents around the Pet Sematary and its adjacent Micmac burial ground. He finally starts to believe that the strange things happening around him and the power of the burial ground are real when he observes the revival of their family cat, Church, after it was buried in the cemetery. Even though he at first tries to explain the whole situation rationally and thinks of possible ways in which Church could have reappeared on the doorstep when he was buried the day before: "... he was a doctor, not a vet. He had made a misdiagnosis, that was all" (164). He later assures himself that "Church had been dead, that was one thing; he was alive now and that was another; there was something *wrong* about him, and that was a third. Something had happened" (174). Despite his initial doubts, Louis ultimately becomes entangled in the sinister and otherworldly elements present in the story. Thus, although he at first approaches the phenomena with reason, his perspective evolves as the story progresses and Louis's

logical approach diminishes due to the unsettling reality of the supernatural occurrences he encounters, leading him down a dark and eerie path.

The realization of the possible resurrection of the dead through the burial ground sets off a sequence of events that eventually completely persuade him to acknowledge the strength and power of the Micmac burial ground: “He had accepted so much that he did not balk at the idea of monsters, or even of demons, discorporeal beings of evil from the outerworld which might well take charge of reanimated body from which the original soul had fled” (King 348). All the uncanny experiences that Louis had gone through had left a clear mark on him and taken over Louis’s mind and sanity to such an extent that by the end of the novel “Louis’s hair had gone white” (461) and “Louis’s face was that of an old, old man” (461). Not only does Louis’s approach to the unearthly resemble that of the narrator in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, but the development of Louis’s character is strikingly reminiscent of what the narrator goes through. However, in the case of Louis, unlike the narrator who is purely influenced by his environment and the demeanour of his friend Roderick, it is a more complicated psychological state where he must grapple alone with his inner demons that advise him to do things that he would never have done without the presence and influence of the Micmac burial ground. Therefore, Louis’s reliance on reason not only prevents him from seeing beyond his own comprehension, but also drives him towards unethical actions fuelled by personal desires. Through Louis’s tragic transformation from a devoted family man to a delusional zombie-creating character, *Pet Sematary* illustrates the shortcomings of relying solely on individualism and rationality, common traits of modern American society (Mercer 135).

In contrast to the previously discussed works, *Pet Sematary* focuses on supernatural elements that stem from American mythology and history. In conjunction with the Micmac burial ground behind the Pet Sematary in the woods, where the most

important events of the story take place and which is the core for its entire plot, King perfectly figured out a way to connect the supernatural with Native American culture and history. For this purpose, he inserted the mythical figure of Wendigo into the story. The Wendigo symbolizes the crossing of boundaries as it blurs the lines between the dead and the living, but also between what is real and what is not. The novel suggests that it can possess individuals, influence them to commit cannibalistic acts, or exist as a separate entity wandering the forests (Corstorphine 90). It is important to point out the fact that King highlights the Wendigo as a creature which is behind all events that take place in the story, suggesting its considerable influence. This underlines the importance of control over the land, which is one of the most important powers. The Wendigo can be thus seen as a symbolic representation of the Native American tribes that once inhabited the land before it was occupied by European settlers, especially considering that the tribal mode of knowledge is portrayed as demonised in the novel (Corstorphine 89-90). Even though the Wendigo never appears directly in the book, it becomes one of the most prominent supernatural elements that consumes Louis's mind, affecting not only him but everyone around him. Because of the tragic events Louis goes through, despite being a rationally thinking doctor, he becomes a victim of the Wendigo, which, as Jud said to Louis, "*has fed on your grief..., no, more than that. It's doubled it, cubed it, raised it to the nth power. And it isn't just grief it feeds on. Sanity. It's eaten your sanity*" (King 447). It is important to note that if the Wendigo feeds on human sanity, it is up to people themselves whether they are affected by this dark creature. Thus, it can be said that although "the power of the bad place in *Pet Sematary* is not limited to the physical borders of the burial ground but is capable of influencing events and people" (Mercer 140), it depends on people's qualities and their ability to keep their minds clear whether they allow themselves to be robbed of their sanity by the Wendigo.

Louis is aware of the burial ground's power and when he meets the Wendigo on his way to bury his dead son, he is seized with panic when it flashes through his mind that it was the Wendigo: "*The Wendigo, dear Christ, that was the Wendigo – the creature that moves through the north country, the creature that can touch you and turn you into a cannibal. That was it. The Wendigo has just passed within sixty yards of me*" (King 412). However, after the initial panic, his rationality as a doctor reasserts itself, and he tries to keep a cool head and banish any thoughts that this creature could be real: "He told himself not to be ridiculous, to be like Jud and avoid ideas about what might be seen or heard beyond the Pet Sematary" (412). Again, this offers a comparison with the narrator in "The Fall of the House of Usher", who, like Louis, is susceptible to the surrounding influences, but still tries not to fall into an irrational mindset. However, despite his best efforts not to think about possible supernatural things, Louis, who is full of grief, is unable to regain his sanity and lets himself be controlled by dark forces that have more power over him than he has over himself.

3 The Theme of Death

3.1 Death in *The Castle of Otranto*

The theme of death is one of the most important elements in Gothic fiction, as it becomes an indispensable driving force of the Gothic atmosphere due to its mysteriousness and incomprehensibility. Death takes on a heightened significance and instils a deeper sense of terror. It becomes a mysterious force that both captivates and repulses (Morris 309). In the case of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, death can be considered one of the central motifs that controls the story from the very beginning, and which, in an insightful way, starts a series of events originating in the opening scene of the novel. Walpole does not view death as a distant concept or a mere lofty notion, instead, it is a central and pervasive theme. It permeates the entire story, almost becoming a prominent character itself. Whether subtly hinted at or directly depicted, death is intricately woven into the Gothic setting of towers, castles, prisons, labyrinths, and untamed wilderness. While Gothic novels often end with scenes of violent demise, death in Walpole's narrative extends far beyond a mere conclusion (308).

It is the setting of the castle and the atmosphere it creates that is closely linked to the theme of death, as the castle is portrayed as an ancient and majestic edifice with a rich history and deep-rooted tradition. Its extensive past, replete with stories of power conflicts, betrayals, and sorrowful events, provides the backdrop for the exploration of death within its confines. The burden of its historical legacy and the echoes of previous inhabitants, especially those surrounding their predecessor Alfonso the Good, whom everyone originally thought to have died "childless in the Holy Land" (Walpole 67), lend the characters a pervasive palpable awareness of mortality and inescapable forces. However, not only its historical significance is linked to the theme of death, but also the grand and imposing architecture of the castle, characterized by its dark corridors and

concealed pathways, which establishes an ominous ambiance that aligns with themes of mortality and deterioration. the “long labyrinth of darkness” (27) of the castle provides a suitable setting for threats and uncanny phenomena, intensifying the characters’ feelings of terror and awareness of their own mortality.

What starts the whole narrative is the unexpected and mystery-shrouded death of Manfred’s son Conrad, who somewhat ironically dies on the day of his birthday and on his wedding day, as “young Conrad’s birth-day was fixed for his espousals” (Walpole 18). What is important, however, is Manfred’s attitude to the death of his only son. Even though “the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the prince’s speech” (19), Manfred’s subsequent reaction does not seem very appropriate for the fact that his son has just died. Although he is taken aback by this sudden event, he does not let any signs of regret or sadness appear: “He touched, he examined the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him. All who had known his partial fondness for young Conrad, were as much surprised at their prince’s insensibility, as thunderstruck themselves at the miracle of the helmet” (19). The reason for Manfred’s lack of sympathy and sorrow for his dead son is the fact that he sees Conrad more as the only possible heir to prevent the demise of his bloodline than as his beloved son. This suggests that Manfred feels not sadness at the loss of his child but worry and fear about how he is now supposed to handle the preservation of the bloodline, which is manifested in the way he converses with the widowed Isabella about his deceased son in order to win her affection: “Think no more about him, interrupted Manfred; he was a sickly puny child, and heaven has perhaps taken him away that I might not trust the honours of my house on so frail a foundation” (24). Since in Gothic fiction genre there always exists a pivotal event that serves as the catalyst for subsequent developments and this pivotal occurrence remains a defining characteristic

of Gothic fiction (MacArthur 141), Conrad's death thus becomes the trigger for a sequence of events that, especially through the character of Manfred incite fear and distrust among the characters, lays the groundwork for the unfolding drama and sets a tone of uncertainty and apprehension lingering throughout the book, indicating to the reader that the narrative will be characterized by peril, suspense, and surprising turns of events.

“After the shock of his son's sudden and inexplicable death, which does not last long, however, Manfred becomes the main character of the story” (Marnieri 48). His decisions and actions throughout the story are thus driven by his fear of death and his desire to preserve his power and lineage. Manfred's fear of death, and thus of the decline of his family line, is manifested in his strange behaviour. He acts in anger and sometimes seems to live out of reality as his actions are seemingly illogical and overly impulsive. Desperate and unable to accept that his bloodline should not continue, he decides to seduce Isabella, who was originally to marry his son Conrad. The reason for this foolhardy act is that Manfred's current wife Hippolita can no longer bear him a child to replace dead Conrad as the male heir: “Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons, –and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes” (Walpole 25). In this sense, it should be noted that the theme of death is closely related to the theme of love and desire, which drives human beings to acts that might not normally occur at all. The enigmatic quality of death is thus further amplified by the Gothic genre's intertwining of themes of love and terror and even though romantic love is constantly postponed and unfulfilled in *The Castle of Otranto*, lust results in surprising encounters combined with mortality (Morris 309). Manfred's desire to preserve the family line and control his destiny drives him to such a point of obsession that he accidentally kills his own daughter Matilda in a state of rage. His aim of marrying Isabella made it impossible

for him to think rationally, and he mistakenly thought he was hearing the voices of Theodore and Isabella who secretly wanted to arrange the marriage: “Manfred will never permit our union” (Walpole 108). However, it was Matilda, with whom Theodor was in love, and Manfred lost his second offspring, thus inadvertently ending his bloodline. Even though Manfred threatened his own daughter with indifference and disdain (23), since she could not become a male heir and thus represented no role for Manfred in his quest to preserve the family, dying Matilda forgives him, which shows the love she has for him: “May heaven bless my father, and forgive him as I do!” (109). The interconnection of love and death is thus portrayed in this case by Manfred’s unrequited love between father and child, for which he was punished in the worst way by losing his only two offsprings through his lack of care for them and his obsession with power.

In general, the death of the two siblings emphasizes the theme of mortality and the inescapable reality of death, showing how easily life can be destroyed by human ambition and cruelty, essentially symbolising the destructive effects of unbridled power and its tragic consequences. At the same time, their deaths serve to reveal the true heir of Otranto, who Manfred wrongly claimed to be. “Manfred thus represents the point at which the accumulation of sin overburdens the prince of Otranto and his family, and at which the present itself can no longer bear sins of the past” (Stampone 76). His sins and the weight of the past eventually caught up with him in the form of the deaths of his own children, who had to die so that the truth of Theodore’s right to inherit the castle would eventually come to light through the spectre of Alfonso: “Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso! said the vision: and having pronounced those words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven” (Walpole 113). It implies that the theme of death in *The Castle of Otranto* is not only limited to human qualities such as love or desire, but also to the unearthly forces that determine the characters’ paths in life

and thus their fate in the form of death. This confirms Freud's theory which points out that the uncanny consistently revolves around two primary themes: death and the supernatural (Morris 307).

3.2 Death in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

As with *The Castle of Otranto*, the theme of death in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is one of the key elements that sets the direction of the narrative and influences the overall plot as well as the characters. Unlike *The Castle of Otranto*, however, the story does not begin with death that forms the rest of it, yet the ubiquitous motif of death can be discerned from the very beginning in the setting in which the characters find themselves. In the case of “The Fall of the House of Usher”, similarly to *The Castle of Otranto*, the motif of death is hidden in various elements associated with the mansion’s interior, exterior, and surrounding environment of the mansion, evoking an omnipresent sense of decay and creating “an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn” (Poe 6). The mansion gives the impression of being dead and lifeless, which is reflected in its dingy and ancient appearance that serves to capture the gradual decay and eventual demise of the entire Usher family: “Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from eaves” (6).

It is important to note that this conspicuous deterioration of the house parallels a physical decline of its inhabitants, which particularly relates to Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline. The similarity between the description of Roderick’s physical appearance and the aforementioned portrayal of the mansion is particularly remarkable, for example in the narrator’s comment on Roderick’s hair, which has the same texture as the fungi spreading all over the mansion: “The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face” (Poe 10). Bailey attributes this similarity to the fact that the arrangement of the house’s stones and the fungal growths that permeate them, the house absorbed the miasmatic

essence that the narrator previously observed as a faint vapor. This essence seems to feed on the souls of the Usher family, extracting vitality through fungi entwined in their hair (457). Regarding Madeline, although her physical similarity in appearance to the house is not very obvious from the text, nor is it directly mentioned, it is important to note that she and Roderick were not only siblings, but also twins, which the narrator learns from Roderick after her burial: "I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them" (18). Moreover, the narrator also mentions, when uncovering the lid of Madeline's coffin, that "a striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention" (17), which contributes to the fact that Roderick and Madeline are "one body" with the house, which is gradually decaying and together they are moving closer to death.

In terms of connecting death to the mental aspect of Roderick and Madeline's illness, there is a gradual deterioration of their psyches and their senses leading to their inevitable end. Thus, the mansion reflects not only the physical decline of its inhabitants, but also a mental similarity to it, suggesting that Roderick and his sister are so connected to the mansion mentally that they form together a unit that cannot be separated. In such case, it can therefore be said that "the Ushers and their House have a common soul, and the death of one means death for all" (Hill 399), which eventually results in the demise of both Roderick and Madeline and the destruction of the entire mansion. However, this raises a question about the fact that Roderick is still alive after Madeline's death. One possible explanation, already mentioned in the previous chapter in connection with the supernatural, is that Madeline was buried alive. Thus, if Madeline is not dead, Roderick must not be dead either. Escape from a well-secured tomb, however, seems rationally impossible for an ordinary person due to the reasons discussed earlier. Agreeing that Madeline was buried alive, it is necessary to explain why Roderick would have done such

a thing to his sister. One reason could be Roderick's deranged mind which robs him of his will to live. He says he must die because he fears what may come and does not want to experience it: "I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of future, not in themselves, but in their results" (Poe 9). Fear of the future of the rest of his family becomes his greatest enemy as he claims that he "must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, Fear" (10). Therefore, if indeed Roderick in his delusional mind believes in his shared soul with Madeline and the house, it is very likely that he decided to end his suffering by burying his sister alive without having to kill her himself. If she eventually dies, he dies too and is put out of his misery.

However, if Madeline is dead and not buried alive, it is important to analyse Roderick's way of thinking about the world. Roderick introduces the notion of "the sentience of all vegetable things" (Poe 15), which means that the mansion and its surroundings have some form of consciousness or vitality: "The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many *fungi* which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around" (15). This belief mirrors Roderick's heightened sensitivity and precarious mental condition, and thus views the environment as sentient. The concept of the sentience of all vegetable things therefore contrasts the theme of decay and mortality and emphasizes the simultaneous presence of both death and life. It suggests the fact that "just as he believes in the sentience of things, Roderick truly believes in the soul of the dead" (Weisheng 295). In that case, it makes sense why Roderick opted "for the temporary entombment" (Poe 17) for his sister rather than a normal grave. He believes in her reincarnation and thus her subsequent return to his life. As he states, Madeline was his "tenderly beloved sister, his sole companion for

long years, his last and only relative on earth” (10) and he cannot imagine living without her. Roderick’s expectation of Madeline’s return is reflected in his behaviour after her burial, which shows signs of nervousness and apprehension about whether she will come back from the realm of the dead: “His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step” (18). On the other hand, it should be noted that Roderick claims to the narrator that they have buried Madeline alive (24). However, if he believes in her reincarnation, it is rather illogical for him to be terrified that Madeline is alive when he is expecting her return. Roderick might as well be worried about the state in which Madeline would return, and as he “heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. ... [he] heard them—many, many days ago” (24), he begins to question whether he did the right thing.

Another possibility is that he said this on purpose in front of the narrator so as not to reveal his secret concerning Madeline’s assumed return as “his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage” (18). Nevertheless, despite various possible explanations, Roderick’s sister returns for one purpose, which is to put a definitive end to the suffering plaguing their family. Thus, both narrator’s friend Roderick and lady Madeline eventually die before his eyes, as Madeline “with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated” (25).

Poe’s critics generally accept Madeline’s resurrection from the grave as a literal fact, but many have refrained from definitively addressing the specific way in which her return from the dead occurred (Walker 591). It is important to keep in mind, then, that it is not entirely obvious from this final scene of “The Fall of the House of Usher” whether

Madeline really did escape the tomb alive, was resurrected, or whether her return took place only in the deluded mind of the narrator and Roderick, as explained in the chapter dealing with the supernatural phenomena. Thus, unlike *The Castle of Otranto*, each reader can interpret the ending of the story in a different way and let their imagination do the work. On the other hand, a similarity can be seen in the end of the Usher family and the demise of the Manfred family in *The Castle of Otranto*. In both cases, the downfall is based on a similar principle, which stems from the gradual decline of the minds of the main characters, the fear of future events and the extinction of the bloodline, which eventually results in either their death or death of the other characters.

3.3 Death in *Pet Sematary*

The motif of death in King's novel *Pet Sematary* is undoubtedly the central theme of the story around which everything revolves. This is already evident in the author's opening words as the novel begins with a catalogue of books authored by individuals who have made significant contributions to the world, and then transitions to a list of people who took care of the dead bodies of these renowned authors but did not share their stories or write books themselves, concluding with King's words: "Death is a mystery, and burial is a secret" (Hogle 269). However, a deeper examination reveals that the essence of the story is not exactly death, but rather the "fear that replaces the fear of death, and that fear is the fear of the return of the dead" (Nash 159). This implies that it is a fear of something unknown and mysterious, and interestingly, in conjunction with death, it recurs in both *The Castle of Otranto* and "The Fall of the House of Usher", although each work presents a slightly different fear, as mentioned in previous chapters. However, unlike the previous works discussed, the theme of death in *Pet Sematary* is intertwined with a deeper psychological analysis of the main characters, as well as the nature of death itself.

It is mainly about how the characters approach death and how they react to it. There are several possible approaches to death and the idea of afterlife in the book, which again creates a mysterious atmosphere that stems from something incomprehensible and inexplicable to humans, something that creates an uncertainty in their lives. The main method by which the characters try to shake off the uncertainty is to exclude the concept of death from their household (Corstorphine 86). Rachel consistently avoids any contact with death because of a harrowing childhood experience in which she witnessed her sister's gradual death from spinal meningitis and now she cannot accept that death is something natural: "I don't want this discussed in front of Ellie any more, Lou. I mean it. There's nothing natural about death. *Nothing*. You as a doctor should know *that*" (King

52). In contrast, Louis draws on his medical knowledge and believes that death is an inherent part of existence and “as a doctor, he knew that death was, except perhaps for childbirth, the most natural thing in the world” (52), which implies that the theme of death in this case represents a clash of opinions as to whether death is something natural or something that people should not try to understand.

Another Gothic feature linked to death, which is present in *Pet Sematary* as well as in *The Castle of Otranto* and in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, is the setting. In the case of the *Pet Sematary*, it is not the Creeds’ house itself that carries the motif of death, but the surroundings of it, specifically Pet Sematary and the Micmac burial ground that becomes a central location where the characters confront both dread and fascination with death. This manifests itself especially in Rachel’s approach to the cemetery. Since she has never been to a funeral with her husband, she becomes furious when Louis takes the children to the Pet Sematary as she firmly believes that any exposure to death is perilous (Mercer 137). However, Pet Sematary, where characters lay their deceased pets to their final rest, also symbolises the purity and fragility of life and the inevitable reality of death, which acts as a miniaturized representation of the larger theme of death explored in the novel. Regarding the Micmac burial ground, located deeper in the woods behind the Pet Sematary, it has an even stronger significance in the narrative than the Sematary itself. It is depicted as an ancient place imbued with powerful and mysterious forces, as “the Micmacs believed this hill was a magic place ... Believed this whole forest, from the swamp on north and east, was magic. They made this place, and they buried their dead here, away from everything else” (King 146). Thus, the supernatural power present in the burial ground, where the distinction between life and death becomes ambiguous, represents the sinister aspects of decay, destruction, and the possibility of rebirth.

Similarly, the busy road in front of Creeds' house, which became the reason for the founding of Pet Sematary by children who lost their pets on the road and "the local kids around Route 15 and Middle Drive keep it nice, because they use it" (Poe 19), is also associated with the death motif, as Jud explains: "It's the road. It uses up a lot of animals, that road does" (19-20). Through recurring misfortunes, the route gradually transforms into a literal death path, which implies the symbol of the fragility of life. In addition, the road symbolizes temptation and danger, especially in relation to the Micmac burial ground beyond it. Characters are drawn to the burial ground as a means of confronting mortality and seeking insight into the afterlife. The road, however, acts as a dividing line between the safety of Creeds' home and the malevolent forces that lurk in the wilderness beyond. Succumbing to the lure of the forbidden knowledge it holds ultimately has tragic consequences for the Creed family: "It is on this road that the Creed's beloved cat Winston Churchill is killed, prompting neighbour Jud to reveal the resurrecting powers of the Micmac burial ground to Louis Creed, and it is on the road that the Creed's young son Gage is later killed, leading to Louis's terrible decision to bring him back from the dead" (Mercer 131). The road thus can be seen as a turning point, which makes Louis abandon his rational thinking about death and through which he tastes the power of the Micmac burial ground.

Another important motif concerning death, which is common to both *Pet Sematary* and "The Fall of the House of Usher", is resurrection, referring again to the fear the characters experience. An essential aspect of the motif of resurrection is the reflection of the idea that death is not absolute, and it can somehow be reversed. In this way the boundaries between life and death are blurred and a person can be alive and dead at the same time. What is fundamental about this fear is its contradiction with what one knows from one's own experience and what one knows from a medical and scientific point of

view (Nash 153). Unlike Madeline's return from the dead in "The Fall of the House of Usher", the resurrection in *Pet Sematary* is explored in more depth, and its meaning is furthermore connected to modern American life. Louis's decision to utilize the Micmac burial ground to bring back his son, and subsequently his wife, reflects his departure from the basic moral principles that define ethical behaviour, and thus underscores the novel's questioning of modern values (Mercer 143). Related to the modernity is the motif of power, which Louis becomes aware of after he brings their cat Church back among the living at Jud's impulse, setting in motion events that might not have happened without the knowledge of this power discovered by Jud after the Creeds' son Gage dies: "I am saying the place might have *made* Gage die because I introduced you to the power in the place" (King 307). Nonetheless, Louis is attracted to the concept of resurrection to assert dominance over mortality, even though he is aware of Jude's advice that "death is sometimes better" (180). As a doctor, Louis is used to feeling in control and adept at medical matters, which tempts him to the possibility of reviving the deceased using the burial ground's mystical powers. This urge to control mirrors a larger societal inclination to depend on scientific progress to surpass inherent constraints. In the same way that Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* allows himself to be controlled by the power that comes from his high position, Louis allows himself to be controlled by the power of Micmac burial ground simply because he cannot resist it: "He thought that perhaps Jud was right about the growing power of that place; for surely he felt it around him now, leading (or pushing) him on, and he wondered: *Could I stop? Could I stop even if I wanted to?*" (364).

Even though in both cases the motif of power stems from the fear of death, in *The Castle of Otranto* it is primarily the fear of the demise of the bloodline, and in *Pet Sematary* it is the fear of losing a family member, which eventually turns into the fear of what comes after death. The consciousness of power controls both main characters and

leads them down a path that, even though they are aware of what they are doing is wrong, results in fatal consequences. In the case of *Pet Sematary*, Louis finds himself exposed to an unbearable sadness that makes him wonder how far he is willing to go to comfort himself. By using reason as an instrument, he rationalizes actions that offer the prospect of easing his own suffering by satisfying his most self-centred desires while disregarding or downplaying ethical concerns (Mercer 143). Eventually, the uncontrollable need for power and unbearable grief causes the death of both Jud and Rachel, who are killed by the resurrected Gage. Louis, however, does not learn from his mistakes and, already fully consumed by the power of the Micmac burial ground, decides to bury his wife there as well. The woman returns the next day: “A cold hand fell on Louis’s shoulder. Rachel’s voice was grating, full of dirt. ‘Darling’, it said” (King 465). By the end of the book, Louis is aware of what he has done, but it is too late to make amends: “*What you buy is what you own, and sooner or later what you own will come back to you*” (465).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the selected elements across three pivotal works of the Gothic genre — *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, and *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King — reveals both commonalities and evolution in the treatment of these elements over time. While all three works explore themes of darkness, mystery, and terror through their settings, supernatural occurrences, and the theme of death, they do so with varying degrees of subtlety and complexity. From Walpole’s explicit supernaturalism and traditional Gothic setting to Poe’s psychological exploration and King’s modernized portrayal of death and the supernatural, these works demonstrate the enduring relevance and adaptability of the Gothic genre in a variety of historical contexts.

In *The Castle of Otranto*, the castle serves as a central motif, enveloping the narrative in an atmosphere of darkness, mystery, and terror. Rather undetailed descriptions of the castle and its surroundings evoke feelings of oppression and powerlessness, enhancing the overall sense of dread and isolation. Through the castle’s labyrinthine passageways and eerie natural phenomena, such as storms and winds, Walpole constructs a setting that becomes integral to the unfolding plot. “The Fall of the House of Usher” shifts the focus to the house of Usher, a decaying mansion that mirrors the deteriorating mental state of its inhabitants. Poe immerses the reader in an isolated world of psychological terror through elaborate descriptions and first-person narration, which represent a contrast to Walpole’s style of depiction. The house becomes a symbolic representation of Roderick Usher’s inner chaos, with its architectural features and surrounding landscape serving as harbingers of impending tragedy. In *Pet Sematary*, the setting takes on a more contemporary and overtly sinister tone. The Creeds’ family home,

nestled between a bustling route and a mysterious Micmac burial ground, becomes a battleground between the forces of modernity and ancient evil. Through the juxtaposition of domestic tranquillity and looming danger, King crafts a setting that reflects broader themes of isolation, loss, and the destructive consequences of human desires. The incorporation of real-world issues, such as land disputes, adds layers of complexity to the novel's Gothic atmosphere, grounding it in the social and political realities of its time.

The analysis of supernatural phenomena in *The Castle of Otranto* reveals a deliberate departure from realism and logic. Through Manfred's struggle against forces beyond his control, Walpole critiques the rationalist tendencies of the Age of Reason and highlights the power of the supernatural to shape human destiny. Walpole's use of repetition in supernatural occurrences, such as ghosts and giants, creates a sense of unease and contributes to the Gothic atmosphere. In contrast, "The Fall of the House of Usher" employs a subtler approach to the supernatural, focusing on psychological and atmospheric elements rather than explicit supernatural occurrences. By employing a first-person narrative and blurring the lines between reality and illusion, Poe explores the fragility of sanity. *Pet Sematary* expands upon traditional Gothic elements by blending supernatural phenomena with American mythology and history. Through the character of Louis Creed, King, in a similar way to Walpole, explores the limits of rationality in the face of overwhelming grief and the allure of dark forces lurking within the human psyche. The inclusion of the Wendigo symbolizes the pervasive influence of the supernatural on human consciousness and the struggle to maintain sanity.

The Castle of Otranto establishes death as a pervasive and driving force, woven into the narrative and setting. It shapes characters' motivations, instils fear and uncertainty, and ultimately leads to tragic consequences. The mysterious demise of Conrad sets off a chain of events driven by Manfred's fear of the end of his bloodline,

illustrating the interplay between power, love, desire, and mortality. Through the deaths of Conrad and Matilda, Walpole underscores the destructive effects of unchecked ambition and the inevitability of fate, culminating in the revelation of Theodore as the true heir. “The Fall of the House of Usher” continues this exploration of death but introduces a more subtle examination of decay, both physical and psychological. The crumbling mansion and its inhabitants mirror each other’s decline and the blurred lines between life and death culminate in Madeline’s resurrection, leading to the tragic demise of both siblings and the destruction of the house itself. Through themes of decay, mental deterioration, and resurrection, Poe explores the intricacies of mortality and the human psyche. In *Pet Sematary*, King modernizes the Gothic tradition by infusing it with contemporary anxieties and moral dilemmas. Death is not merely a mysterious force but a source of fear and temptation, symbolized by the Micmac burial ground. King delves into the psychological complexities of grief and the human desire to defy mortality, portraying how the pursuit of power over death leads to tragic consequences.

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