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Bakalářská práce

# **(Mock-)Gothic Characters in Oscar Wilde's The Canterville Ghost**

(Ne)Gotické postavy v knize Strašidlo cantervillské od  
Oscara Wilda

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## Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vykreslením postav v povídce *The Canterville Ghost* napsané Oscarem Wildem, která se řadí ke gotické literatuře, ale zároveň ji svým způsobem paroduje. Humorná povídka *The Canterville Ghost* dále satiricky poukazuje na rozdíly myšlení mezi Američany a Brity. Teoretická část obsahuje základní charakteristiku gotického žánru, informace o autorovi Oscaru Wildovi a typologii základních gotických postav, jak v rané, tak v pozdní gotické literatuře. V praktické části se nachází popis děje povídky, charakteristika postav a porovnání jejich chování, způsobu vyjadřování nebo vzhledu s jinými gotickými postavami s posouzením, zda a jak odpovídají konvencím gotického žánru.

## Abstract

The subject of this bachelor thesis is the portrayal of the characters in the short story *The Canterville Ghost* written by Oscar Wilde, which belongs to Gothic literature but at the same time parodies it in its own way. The humorous short story *The Canterville Ghost* additionally satirizes the differences in thinking between Americans and Britons. The theoretical part provides a basic characterization of the Gothic genre, information about the author Oscar Wilde, and a typology of typical Gothic characters in both early and late Gothic literature. The practical part includes a description of the plot of the story, characterization of the figures, and a comparison of their behaviour, manner of expression, or appearance with other Gothic characters in order to assess to what degree and how they correspond to the conventions of the Gothic genre.

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# 1 Introduction

This Bachelor thesis examines the characters of the humorous short story *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) by Oscar Wilde. The main goal is to recognize which characters adopt features typical of Gothic literature, and which are used by Oscar Wilde to parody the Gothic genre. The theoretical part outlines the typical features of Gothic literature, its origin and development. Subsequently, the term parody explained, and the life and work of Oscar Wilde are introduced. The last chapter of the theoretical part specifies the characteristic features of male, female, and children's characters appearing in Gothic literature.

The practical part of the thesis explains how the British perceived America and Americans during the Victorian era and for what reasons. The following section retells the plot of the short story *The Canterville Ghost* and identifies Gothic elements found in it. The characters of the story are then described using examples from the text. The last chapter discusses which characters take on the typical features of Gothic figures and which, in contrast, parody elements and conventions of the Gothic genre.

## 2 Gothic literature

### 2.1 *The definition and characteristic of the Gothic*

When we think about the meaning of the word 'Gothic' today, we are likely to imagine various famous literary or historical works. The word 'Gothic' is derived from the name of an influential Germanic tribe, the Goths. According to Tacitus's 'Germania', the men of the tribe were waiting for war most of the time and women were working. The Goths are known for their faith in gods, forests, and an early form of 'democracy' that ruled the tribe. (Miles, 2015)

The Gothic novel was a type of romance that became exceedingly popular between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. The word 'Gothic', associated with the early Middle Ages, came to mean 'barbaric', 'savage', and 'brutal'. These qualities were seen by writers as highly appealing to the readers in contrast to the serene neoclassicism of the earlier 18th-century culture. The plot of Gothic novels was mostly set in the past, specifically in the Middle Ages and foreign lands, especially the Catholic countries

of southern Europe. Most plots in Gothic literature took place in various strongholds, mountain regions, monasteries, and dungeons, while the storylines were mostly full of suspense and mystery, often involving the supernatural. (Ousby, 1993)

Gothic buildings, songs, and novels were often considered uncultivated due to the negative connotations of the term 'Gothic' mentioned above. However, over time, qualities such as extravagance, fantasy, wildness, and superstition were combined with the prospects of aesthetic formation in the 18th century and people no longer perceived them so negatively. Nevertheless, the word 'Gothic' never completely lost its earlier negative connotations and therefore, Gothic literature could not be fully integrated into the framework of proper literature. Throughout the time of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, there were eminent social, economic, political, and cultural changes, which caused various problems for individuals, and above all, the perception of social identity changed during this period. Some people suddenly did not know what their place was in society, and the consequences included the possible severing of existing social ties in the population. Industrialization, revolution, and urbanization were the main signs of the change. In addition, Enlightenment side-lined religion by trying to provide rational explanation of human, natural or imagined worlds and people's relations to them. Gothic works reconstructed divine mysteries that reason rejected and can be seen as the effects of fear and anxiety that shaped people's feelings during such significant changes and shifts. (Botting, 1996)

The most important theoretical piece of writing linked with the Gothic is Edmund Burke's work entitled *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1757. It explains the psychological and aesthetic reaction to beauty, which can be disturbing, frightening, or seductive. He says that beauty does not have to be always symmetrical and planned but that wild mountain panoramas or ancient ruins, for example, are attractive and able to generate very strong feelings too. He developed a specific idea of the sublime, which influenced art and literature throughout Europe. His claim is echoed in Ann Radcliffe's book *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), which draws on the aesthetic of the sublime when describing castles and alpine scenery, and the book's protagonist Emily's feelings when appreciating the mesmerising settings. (Crow, 2009)

Gothic taste manifested itself not only in literature but also significantly influenced the architecture of the end of the 18th century and the 19th century. The original medieval Gothic architecture dominated from the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and one of its characteristic features were very tall buildings, which received a substantial amount of light. The reason for especially sacral buildings to be built so tall was to make people feel a stronger and more direct connection with God. The Abbey of Saint-Denis, located in the capital of France, Paris, and built between 1134 and 1144, is considered to be the principal building of the style. Between 1250 and 1300 during the High Gothic period, Gothic architecture developed mainly in France, as demonstrated by the world-famous Gothic Chartres cathedral. Other European countries such as Germany, Britain, and Spain began to build similar stone structures. Only Italy differed significantly in its use of marble or brick instead of traditional stone materials. A great turning point were the vaulted hall churches in Germany in the 15th century, thanks to which Gothic architecture reached its greatest success and recognition. The new Gothic Revival in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was inspired mainly by medieval architecture and contrasted with Neoclassical buildings in Great Britain and in the United States of America between 1750 and 1880. This style is linked with the Romantic Revolution, which made people interested, among others, in the Middle Ages. One of the most prominent and earliest examples of Gothic Revival architecture is Strawberry Hill, the residence of the founder of the Gothic literary genre, Horace Walpole (1717-1707). In 1840 in England, Sir Charles Barry and A.W.N. Pugin designed the new parliament building, which in its appearance also referred to the English Middle Ages and ranks among the most famous Gothic Revival buildings in England. (Britannica, 2023, March 17; Britannica, 2023, June 14)

## 2.2 *The origins and development of the genre*

The earliest work of Gothic literature is generally considered to be *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. His father was Robert Walpole (1676-1745), who is regarded to have been the first British Prime Minister and was part of the aristocratic government, which means that the state was led mainly by influential and wealthy people. Horace Walpole followed his father and also was for some time of his life a Member of Parliament. As already mentioned, he became famous for his villa called Strawberry Hill,



which partially represents the early Gothic Revival style. During his lifetime, he made the building available to tourists, who were very interested in the intriguing paintings, the library, or the overall Gothic appearance and architectural elements such as the turrets. One of Walpole's great hobbies was writing letters, which he saw not only as a medium of communication but also as a kind of art. The letters he exchanged with the diplomat Horace Mann (1706-1786) were even published for their humour and readable style. The content of his books predetermined the aim and character of Gothic literature. Walpole published his first novel anonymously but over time, when the novel began to reap success, he revealed to the society that he was its author. The main character of this successful work is Prince Manfred of the castle of Otranto, whose life is affected by a series of unpleasant complications. At the beginning of the story there is a tragic death where Manfred loses his weak young son. Such tragic events are very common in Gothic novels. The themes of the book are family, power, the supernatural and injustice. There are many unexplained situations and a surprising ending. In works that belong to the Gothic genre, it is common for the main character to be overcome with rage and accidentally injure or murder someone he truly loves with his own hand instead of the person he originally intended to kill. In *The Castle of Otranto*, a similar situation occurs when Manfred decides to commit a murder out of jealousy and wants to take revenge on the main female character Isabella because she does not want to marry him and have children with him, but ends up accidentally murdering his daughter Mathilda. The setting of the story is very mysterious, dark, and spooky. The story takes us to situations where chains are rattling, or thunders are beating in the background. The book claims to be based on a fictional historical narrative, like most other Gothic novels that were published later. What was new to the audience is the fine line between irony and seriousness that according to Botting (1996), typifies *The Castle of Otranto* and, later, the genre as a whole. (Britannica, 2023, June 1)

When examining the origins of Gothic literature, it is very important to mention Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), who was a best-selling author in the 1790s because of the originality and surprising plots of her books. Ann Radcliffe's parents were merchants and they spent much of their lives in Holborn, one of London's business districts. Her husband, William Radcliffe, was a journalist and editor of *The Morning Chronicle*. The main character of her books was usually a woman who had a negative attitude towards marriage and had a lot of

unpleasant and repressed thoughts in her mind because of the terrible things her father had done. An excellent example is her most successful book, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which the father of the protagonist Emily wishes her to burn his hidden papers that are in his bedroom. As soon as Emily wants to fulfil this task, a ghost begins to haunt her. Similar characters are repeated in Radcliffe's second novel *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), in which the main figures are frightened by ghostly sounds that come from their own mother, who is secretly imprisoned in a part of the castle by their father. Robert Miles (2015) finds in her stories the features of novels of sensibility, which means that the supernatural is ultimately rationally explained. Radcliffe has been criticized for her purposive explanation of the supernatural, as it may spoil the magic of the mystery on which the Gothic narrative is based.

The role of nature in her stories is extensive and significant. A large part of her books consists of detailed descriptions of the environment in which the characters are located. For example, in the first parts of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the main characters Emily and her father St. Aubert are on a journey along the Mediterranean Sea, through a part of Roussillon, the vast plains of Languedoc and the Pyrenees mountains. Nature becomes a source of the sublime; different types of landscapes evoke different feelings and memories in the characters, for example, astonishment, fear, or sadness at the loss of a loved one that St. Aubert and his daughter Emily experience following his wife's death. A strong relationship with nature is also well visible in the situation when St. Auber tells Emily that they are almost penniless, and she tries to reassure her father that he does not have to be sad because the beauty of nature will still be available to them forever. (Miles, 2015)

Ann Radcliffe formulated a distinction between horror and terror, based on the contrast between clarity and obscurity. When a threat takes a particular shape, it causes people to feel disgust or terror, which are linked to the imagination of the individual. When Ann Radcliffe's heroines find themselves in a situation where they fear possible rape or physical attack, their reaction is horror, which in her opinion represents the physical experience of fear. In contrast, terror is a much deeper and more intense experience in situations where they feel existentially threatened. (Miles, 2015)

The third most important name among the early Gothic writers is Mathew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818). The family situation in which he grew up is completely different from that of Ann Radcliffe. His father was a respected civil servant, and the family was therefore very wealthy. There were speculations about Matthew Lewis's sexual orientation. According to Miles (2015), it was because he belonged to an opulent family and had a high position in society, that he was not in great danger because of his sexual orientation. Many important authors of Gothic literature were homosexuals, such as the aforementioned Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis, and also Oscar Wilde, whose work is the central focus of this thesis. According to Eve Kosovsky Sedwick (qtd. in Miles, 2015, p. 97), Gothic literature was the first novel form in England that had very close and visible ties to homosexuality. Matthew Lewis's works contain sensationalism and irony. The main difference from Ann Radcliffe's books is that he did not explain the supernatural in any way. Lewis's most important works include *The Monk* (1796) and *The Castle Spectre* (1797). The plot of *The Castle Spectre* contains a classic Gothic theme that keeps repeating in Gothic stories: the main character Osmond plans to murder his brother in order to acquire the family property and the woman he desires. Just like in *The Castle of Otranto*, Osmond, influenced by anger, accidentally murders the woman he loves instead of killing his brother. Later in the book, Osmond falls in love again, with his niece, which was very shocking at the time. The theme of incest also appears in his most famous work *The Monk* and it also inspires future writers of Gothic literature. *The Monk* is a very raw book and often disturbs people with its content, for example, the scenes where the nun gives birth to a child, or the abbess inhumanely punishes sex offenders. (Miles, 2015)

When comparing the works of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis, Robert Miles (2015) mentions the differentiation between 'male' and 'female' Gothic. It began with Ellen Moers, who invented and described the term 'female Gothic' and as a result, 'male Gothic' was also invented. This division made it easier to identify Gothic works or even schools that Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis represented based on gender. 'Feminine Gothic' was a term that primarily included books that were written in the late 18th century and signified a particular genre where women wrote books for women. In the production classed as 'feminine Gothic', the plot usually features an orphaned woman searching for her mother who never gave her enough love or care. Another very common plotline was a young

motherless female figure being pursued by her father, or, another paternal figure, which was meant to point to the patriarchy of the time. In contrast to this, 'male Gothic' mainly dealt with the various problems that men experienced or could have with higher authority. In 'male Gothic' we can notice that irony is a frequent feature. It can be found in the work of Horace Walpole *The Castle of Otranto*, or in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. Another difference between 'female Gothic' and 'male Gothic' is that the main reason women wrote books was to make money, whereas men were mostly from the upper classes and therefore making money was not their main goal. (Miles, 2015)

The next major author who influenced Gothic literature and inspired many people with her writing is Mary Shelley (1797-1851), most famous for *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. Mary Shelley's life was far from easy. Her birth caused her mother's death, and she also lost four children and her husband during her lifetime. She always tried to support the women around her. For example, when a friend of hers was thrown out of the house by her husband for being unfaithful to him, Mary immediately took her in and tried to help her in any way possible. (Seymour, 2008) Her plan was never to become a noted writer, she started writing books for fun with her friends and in the process, it became clear that she had a tremendous imagination and talent. Her novel *Frankenstein* hugely impacted literature and pop culture in the 19th century, which continues to this day. The story of *Frankenstein* is widely known, even by people who have never read the book. Since book's publication, there have been countless stories and horror films that have taken inspiration from Mary Shelley's work and just changed the plot in some way. Miranda Seymour (2008) mentions an interesting study in America which found that children were more likely to recognize the name of Frankenstein than the current President of the United States, which only confirms that this work is a true global masterpiece. The main themes of the book are science, appearance, fear, the desire for love, life, and death. The story of the book evokes in the reader a feeling of sympathy for the monster. The main lesson is that people should not form an opinion and attitude only on the basis of somebody's appearance. Shelley probably also wanted to show problems related to racism when Europeans have the feeling that they are superordinate to other nationalities or races. (Seymour, 2008)

### 2.2.1 Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic

At the end of the 19th century, numerous Gothic texts were created, and they shared many common features, but because many years had passed since the first works of Gothic literature, these books differ significantly from the earlier ones. The most prominent pieces and writers of the time are *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker (1847-1912), *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Charles Dickens (1812-1870), and especially *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde. What made these books different from the original ones? Earlier Gothic stories mostly took place in the environment of old castles or chateaux, negative characters were often represented by the corrupt nobility, and sex was often connected with Christian characters such as nuns and monks. Later Gothic works also include mystery, but the action takes place in the present, i.e. during the late 19th century. Contemporary settings were not usual for earlier Gothic works as they had been usually set in a fictional time, often in the past. Furthermore, it is important to mention that later Gothic literature reflected and responded to the problems of contemporary society, such as poverty or the fear of immigrants. The environment is also different, because the stories are often located in cities and their streets as opposed to chateaux or castles, and overall, the authors no longer focus so much on nature and the landscape as on the persons themselves, their physical and above all mental side, which can be very disturbing. (Buzwell, 2014)

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Great Britain was influenced by Charles Darwin's research *On the origin of species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). Therefore, numerous works, such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are closely related to science, medicine, and psychology. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) studied evolution and the origin of man in general and argued that humans evolved from animals. In the book *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the character called Hyde represents an uncivilized early human who is known to have developed from an animal in contrast to Doctor Henry Jekyll, who is an educated and exemplary man. (Buzwell, 2014)

Another significant element of the characters was their appearance. The influential Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) claimed that "the 'born criminal' could be recognised by certain physical characteristics – unusually sized ears, for example, or

asymmetrical facial features; particularly long arms or a sloping forehead" (Buzwell, 2014). This idea is present in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where it manifests itself in the difference between the appearance of the main character and the reflection in the mirror, in which Dorian Gray looks much creepier and uglier. (Buzwell, 2014)

### 2.2.2 American Gothic

Oscar Wilde's story *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), which is the main focus of this bachelor's thesis, highlights the various cultural differences between Americans and Britons. Due to the behaviour of the main characters, who are from America and move to Great Britain, the reader can notice that they approach certain situations much more pragmatically and have less respect for tradition than the native Britons, who are represented primarily by the former residents of Canterville Chase and the Canterville ghost itself.

Due to differences between American and British societies and cultures, there are also differences between American and British Gothic texts. According to Crow (2009, p.1), the main characteristic of Gothic literature in America is that it deals with the concerns and prohibited longings of the American population. Thanks to Gothic literature, suppressed social classes that had not previously been able to speak out were given the opportunity to do so. Another typical aspect is that they began to open up a variety of taboo areas such as incest, miscegenation, and several types of disease. Other major topics that have shaped American culture are, of course, gender and racism, as they still do today. American history is shorter than the British, and since it is a rule in the traditional English Gothic literature to find some kind of ancient ruin, country churchyard, castle, or chateau in the plot that evokes feelings of secrecy and melancholia in the reader, it was challenging for American authors to fill this gap. American Gothic, therefore, concentrated not so much on the ambiance of castles and similar structures, but rather on an insight into the core of individuals, especially into their psyche, morality, and ways of experiencing. Very crucial is that they lacked the medieval history and the mysteries that are tied to it. The heroes of American Gothic mostly do not clash with the family ghosts of the past, but with their own selves. Locations do not just serve as an external background, but their principal function is to convey the feelings and emotions of the figures, in other words as internalisations of themselves. As with British Gothic, American Gothic contains elements of the supernatural in its works, such as

vampires. Notable American Gothic authors include Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), Stephen King (b. 1947), and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). In the Poe's poem called 'The Haunted Palace', as in *The Canterville Ghost*, the haunted house and the character of the ghost appear among the main themes. This proves that despite differences the themes of the works of American and British Gothic literature often overlap. (Crow, 2009)

The poem 'The Haunted Palace' appears in Poe's short story 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), which also has other features in common with *The Canterville Ghost*, for example scary sounds. The estate where the story takes place is very dark and mysterious, as is the mind of the main character Roderick Usher and the environment around the house, where trees decay and ponds become cloudy. Here it is possible to see how the psyche of Roderick merges with the external environment. And although many supernatural phenomena can be explained by mental disorders, they point to areas that escape rationality. In this short story, we learn that the house where the main character Roderick Usher lives is cursed and has a significant effect on his psyche. At the same time, the house represents the entire Usher family that is forced to live there. The narrator points out that only one member of the Usher family has survived from generation to generation, creating a direct line of descent without any external branches. The theme of incest is frequently depicted in early British Gothic literature as previously mentioned in Chapter 1.2., for example in Mathew Lewis's *The Monk*. The plot of the story is also linked to the claustrophobia that the house evokes in the characters, especially the part where Roderick buries his sister alive. The death associated with claustrophobia is also depicted in *The Canterville Ghost* where the main character Sir Simon de Canterville reveals to Virginia that he was imprisoned by his brothers in law in a secret chamber where he died of starvation as punishment for murdering his wife. Subsequently, Sir Simon haunted the inhabitants of Canterville Chase, who were of the same lineage and perceived it as a family curse.

### 2.2.3 The influence of Gothic literature on contemporary fiction

Since the 20th century until today, the Gothic genre has crossed into modern and fantasy literature and, above all, into cinematography. Gothic elements and characters are very popular with both children and adults. Children's production includes, for example, the

film adaptation of *Coraline* (published 2002; film released 2009) by Neil Gaiman (b. 1960) or the animated film series *Hotel Transylvania* (released 2012-2022), where werewolves, vampires, mummies, and Frankenstein's monster are depicted. Especially horror movies and both the book and film versions of Stephenie Meyer's literary productions *Twilight Saga* (published 2005-2016; films released 2008-2012), where vampires and werewolves fight, are very popular among teenagers. Elements of Gothic literature are also present in *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* (film released 2019), with Angelina Jolie in the lead role. The main character is betrayed by the man she loves and spends most of her time in a mysterious forest full of supernatural beings such as goblins, fairies, and walking trees. Some of the most famous literary series adaptations are based on novels by J.K. Rowling the *Harry Potter Saga* (published 1997-2007; films released 2001-2011), which also include a lot of Gothic elements. At the beginning of the first book, we learn about the tragic childhood of the main character Harry Potter, who grows up as an orphan. Such tragic fates are typical for Gothic characters, especially when it comes to the loss of loved ones. During the story, many supernatural monsters appear, such as trolls, dragons, house elves, dementors, and phoenixes. The dark environment and weather often reflect the seriousness of some of the events and increase the tension of the plot. This is also shown in the scene where the final and most important fight happens during a thunderstorm and heavy rain.

### 2.3 Gothic parody

Generally, the term parody means imitating and mocking someone else's production, therefore it can have a detrimental effect because it tries to point out the shortcomings, differences, and extravagances of the author in question. But parody does not always have to be negative, sometimes the author of the parody just attempts to express his admiration for the writer of the original text. Authors of parodies tend to focus mainly on the most famous works, but even great authors have used parody in their works. For example, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) imitated Christopher Marlowe's theatrical approach in one scene of his successful drama *Hamlet*. (Britannica, 2023, June 1) Parodies of literary works have been very popular all over the world. For instance, in America numerous parodies of Edgar Allan Poe's works were created. Parody is frequently linked to Gothic literature because it was quite eccentric and shocking to society and therefore parodists liked to mock it. Between 1760 and 1830, a large number of parodies of Gothic works were produced in a



multitude of forms such as romance, poetry, drama, and tale. In most cases, the original pieces have survived rather than the parodies, which were indeed very popular among the people, but still not as memorable as the originals. Two of the most significant parodies of Gothic literature are Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), which still receive wide fame and acclaim today. (Neill, 2015)

## 3 Oscar Wilde

### 3.1 *Life and work*

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin, on 16 October 1854. His father, Sir William Wilde (1815-1876), was a renowned physician, who cured the ordinary people living in the Irish countryside. Wilde looked up to both his parents and admired their work and personalities. When his father went to cure the poor villagers, he never demanded money but only wished to be told folktales from the rural areas which they came from. Oscar occasionally accompanied his father on his medical missions and listened to these stories with keen interest. Sir William Wilde published several books during his lifetime that could have been an inspiration for Oscar to become a writer, and he also devoted himself to archaeology and folklore, which were the main themes of his publications. Oscar regarded his mother as an incredibly courageous woman because in 1846 while Ireland was under English rule and the so-called Great Irish Famine was underway, she published anti-English poetry under the pseudonym 'Speranza', for which she faced the threat of imprisonment. Beyond this, she was also an expert on Celtic myth and folklore like his father and was highly respected by the Irish people for the Irish fight for independence, which she participated in by writing. Oscar Wilde grew up in Dublin, with two siblings, in a financially comfortable family. Sadly, his sister Isola passed away at the age of 10, which was extremely traumatic and difficult for him to deal with, so until his own death he retained a strand of her hair, reminding him of his sister. (Wilde et al., 2005)

Oscar Wilde studied in Dublin for a large part of his life and later transferred to Oxford University, where he was noted for having a unique perception and valuation of beauty. He was very sensitive to sounds and colours, which can be seen in his writing, and he always looked for beauty even in ugliness. His grades were excellent, and during his studies, he devoted himself mainly to Greek, Latin, and Philosophy, in which he excelled. He was also

the winner of a University poetry competition called Newdigate, thanks to his long, fine, and engaging poem 'Ravenna' (1878). After successfully completing his studies, he moved to London and thought about what to do with his life. He published some poetry, but critics did not appreciate it. In 1882, he was invited to lecture in America and Canada on the perception of beauty in modern life, which was a great success for him, but he was teased for his unusual style of dressing because he wore a velvet jacket, a wide hat, short pants below the knees and silk stockings. In San Francisco, he was popular especially with the Irish community, because of his mother, who opposed English rule with her revolutionary acts. When he returned to England after all his travels and lectures, he was already well known to society. In 1884 he married a writer Constance Lloyd (1858-1898), who was of Irish descent like him, and they had 2 sons together, Cyril in 1885 and Vyvyan in 1886. (Wilde, 2005; Britannica, 2023, March 31)

Oscar Wilde did not adapt his tone and style to a young audience, he spoke to them in the same language as to adults, yet some of his works could be seen as a fairy tale for children, especially with their plot and supernatural characters. An example is the short story *The Canterville Ghost*, published in 1887, that can be read as a children's story as well as a comedy or horror. His first eminent work of art is *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, which he wrote while he was editor of *Woman's World* from 1887 to 1889. Later, in 1891, he published his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which contains significant elements of Gothic literature, but also aestheticism and decadence. The novel's main figure is a handsome young man Dorian Gray who sells his soul to remain forever young while his portrait ages. By aging his portrait, he frees himself from the guilt of all the sins he committed during his life. Like a lot of other Gothic works from this period, the plot is set in the city and focuses primarily on the psychological side of the main character and the change in his perception of what is morally wrong before he gets the painting and afterwards when he does not have to be concerned that his crimes will be visible on his exterior. The aesthetic movement with which Oscar Wilde is often associated claimed that art does not necessarily always have to point to any moral lessons and can still be beautiful. The question of beauty, and moral values, is therefore also one of the themes of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel was created during the period of decadence, which is known for the fact that the authors of this time despised society and its traditions. They had problems integrating into

society because they felt misunderstood, and their lifestyle was often associated with substance abuse and narcissism. Many authors belonged to the so-called cursed authors, including Oscar Wilde, or Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). In 1892, Oscar Wilde produced the play *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and a few years later, in 1895, he published another entertaining play called *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which became vastly popular and, at the same time, distinctive for him in general. In his texts, he repeatedly uses old-fashioned and uncommon words to make them more enigmatic and poetic. Many of his plots are based on the revelation of a secret sin, or thoughtlessness and the resulting bashfulness. (Britannica, 2023, March 31)

The incident that changed his whole life and also made him visible to the world was his falling in love with the young poet Lord Alfred Douglas (1870-1945), who was the son of a respected nobleman. Oscar Wilde was therefore put on trial and because at that time homosexual behaviour was criminal in England, he was imprisoned for 2 years (1895-1897). After his release, he emigrated to France because he was treated as an outcast by English society. He never had the opportunity to see his wife or children again. In 1898 he published his last work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), which displays his worries about the inhumane conditions in which prisoners must live day after day. He had great financial problems during his life in France and died very young on November 30, 1900, at the age of 46 in Paris, of meningitis which was caused by an ear infection. Oscar Wilde was very celebrated among his supporters due to the fact that he fought against social injustice and also always liked to help others. (Wilde, 2005; Britannica, 2023, March 31)

#### 4 Main features of Gothic characters

The main features of Gothic characters are dependent on their gender, age and on the time when the book was written. Female characters in Gothic literature are usually restricted in their freedom because men have more power. They are persecuted, forced to marry someone, or also imprisoned in a castle, chateau, or monastery. They are often submissive, very sensitive and give a pure and innocent impression. For example, in the first part of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, where the main character is a young girl Emily St. Aubert, the reader can see her perception of various life situations she experiences, where she is not content with the development but instead of resisting, she usually respects

and submits to authority. Herein, the texts reflect the injustice of patriarchal society, which is seen, for example, in the second part of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* where Emily decides to escape from the fortress in which she is being held by her deceased aunt's husband, who wants to claim her property inherited from her departed father and aunt. The traditional Gothic heroines can sometimes come across as naive and overly dramatic. Another recurring characteristic is that they have a very close relationship with nature, which they often acquire from their parents. Nature evokes different memories of their loved ones and makes them feel joy or grief. Female characters usually help and support each other, but this is not always the case. In the previously mentioned *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily has a very complicated relationship with her aunt at first because her aunt is very materialistic and authoritative, but when her aunt is dying and must decide who will get her property, she gives it to her niece. Religion also plays an eminent role in Gothic books, specifically Christianity, which is respected by the heroines and therefore they usually take the supernatural very seriously, because they associate it with God and his infinite power. Female secondary characters in books are often very devoted to men, as in *The Castle of Otranto*, where the wife of the main character Manfred named Hippolita, as well as his daughter Matilda, are completely loyal to him and even though they do not always agree with his decision, they submit to him because they look up to him and respect him. Female characters in Gothic novels are mostly nuns, abbesses, wives or daughters of noble men, or their servants. (Milbank, 2007)

Male protagonists are generally very dominant, goal-oriented and do not consider the impact their actions may have on others. They often make decisions based on the emotions of the moment and act out of anger. It is mostly powerful and noble men who are the antagonists of the story, such as Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*, who thinks primarily of himself, is very materialistic and passionate. For the most part, they have difficulty suppressing their ego and desires. This is not always the case, for example in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of the main characters Valancourt treats other people very considerately and is sensitive, just like most of the female characters. The main themes of Gothic stories with strong male characters are principally revenge, violence, irrationality, and madness. In later Gothic literature, mainly that written during the literary periods of romanticism and neo-romanticism, some of the main male characters are highly educated and, unlike early

Gothic literature, they try to behave rationally, such as Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein* or Dr. Henry Jekyll from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In both of these books, the lead characters realize the bad deeds they have done, such as Victor Frankenstein creating a monster that was huge and had the power to kill a person, and Dr. Henry Jekyll devising a way by which he could separate his good and bad selves, changing his appearance as well but gradually discovering the consequences of it and regretting the action. The main male character can also be a supernatural being, as for example in *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, where the main character is an educated count and, at the same time, a vampire, who controls other vampires and causes the death of innocent people. The situation is similar in *The Canterville Ghost*, where the main character is a ghost of a man who had murdered his wife and wants to scare and banish the new family that has moved into Canterville Chase. Yet here, the reader can find sympathy for him throughout the story as they learn of his horrific death and simultaneously perceives the situations where the ghost is ridiculed by the family. Nevertheless, some male protagonists in Gothic literature are such negative characters that it is very difficult to sympathize with them, as for example in the book *The Silence of the Lamb* (1988) by the American writer Thomas Harris (b. 1940), in which the main character Dr. Hannibal Lecter, is a genius but also a manipulative serial killer who knows no compassion and even cooks and eats his victims. (Baker, 2007)

Children's characters in Gothic literature are predominantly very brave, because thanks to their imagination, they can take the supernatural seriously, unlike adults who think about things more rationally. Since they appear in stories that take place during their childhood, the relationship with their family is also important, whether they respect their parents or, on the contrary, feel that they are neglected by them. For example, in the short story 'The New Mother' (1882) by Lucy Clifford (1846-1929), where the children called Blue-Eyes and Turkey admire their mother, they obey her at the beginning of the story in any situation, for instance when they have to go to the post office in the cold. They are very sensitive and when they meet a girl in ragged clothes, they immediately run to her, which shows that they like to help others. Blue-Eyes and Turkey live in their infantile reality and are very curious all the time, which makes them easy to manipulate. Their mother takes advantage of it and explains to them that if they were naughty children, another mother with glass eyes and a wooden tail would come. In comparison, in the book *Coraline* by Neil

Gaiman, which is partially inspired by 'The New Mother', the main character Coraline feels the deficiency of attention from her parents, and she lacks respect for them for this reason. (Walsh, 2007)

## 5 Perceptions of America

Today's America is the way it is because of the British colonies and its close relations with Britain in general, which helped it to develop. Due to the fact that America is such a huge country, it is nowadays very powerful and helps Britain back in many ways, such as trade and food supplies. One of the main stereotypes that people associated and associate with America during the Victorian era and today is corruption and the influence of money and wealth on society. But there is also a shared history and a common language that connect the two nations. It was often difficult for a Victorian writer to criticize a country that was so racially, linguistically, and culturally similar to England. Some authors criticized, for example, the lack of traditional culture such as art galleries or statues, or what they saw as American recklessness. Nevertheless, many authors and British citizens also adored America and some even made comparisons between Boston and Edinburgh, or New York and European towns. (Deirdre, 2012)

America was also much discussed because of the prevalence of slavery, which was described, for instance, in Charles Dickens' *American Notes* (1842) where he tries to give the British a picture of what it is like in independent America. According to Dickens, the Americans did not deserve dominance in the territories they had acquired, and they should be returned to the native inhabitants. He further claims that the persistence of slavery actually devalued the achievements of the developing American nation. Yet, Dickens decided to visit America a second time, which made a much better impression on him so that he wrote an additional text for future editions of *American Notes* that enhanced the earlier unflattering image in the original text. Still, many British believed that displacing Indians was too cruel and that the treatment of slaves and Indians did not align with American ideals of freedom and independence. The Americans' behaviour towards women was a similar problem because the British felt that they did not treat them with enough decency and that women should have the same opportunities for education as men. The American diet, which contains a lot of sugar and insufficient guidance for children to exercise, was also

controversial, as it is today. Furthermore, some British citizens and authors expressed their disappointment that during the American Civil War Britain was supporting the immoral and savage South only out of selfish motives in order to acquire cotton from the plantations. The American West, on the other hand, was associated with human greed and the wilful destruction of nature due to urban expansion and economic development. (Deirdre, 2012)

Oscar Wilde arrived in New York in 1882 to start a tour and give his two important lectures, the first titled 'The English Renaissance' and the second 'Decorative Arts in America.' The interesting fact is that the letters to his English friends, where he humorously mocks American customs, proved to be in many ways more fascinating than his lectures. While Wilde considered everything that he saw to be a source of amusement, other writers who visited America, including Charles Dickens, wrote very seriously about moral issues like slavery or the uneducated state of women. In general, Oscar Wilde viewed many things differently. Charles Dickens was, for example, interested in American prisons in Philadelphia and other states because he was horrified by the way how the guards treated the prisoners or the conflicts between prisoners, in contrast to Oscar Wilde, who had little interest in social problems and he was only interested in the appearance of prisoners in striped clothes. His view of American society is manifested in *The Canterville Ghost* where he compares American simplicity and materialistic thinking with the British sense of superiority and respect for history and traditions. (Deirdre, 2012, p. 679-680)

## 6 The Canterville Ghost

### 6.1 Plot summary

The short story is divided into seven chapters. At the beginning of the first chapter, there is a bargain made between an American Minister Mr. Hiram B. Otis and Lord Canterville over the sale of Canterville Chase. Lord Canterville warns Mr. Hiram B. Otis and explains to him the history of the castle. Lord Canterville's family lived there for several centuries and because of the ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville, many unpleasant events have happened to them. For example, when his aunt felt bony hands touching her shoulders and it scared her so much that she never recovered, or how his wife was unable to sleep in the castle because of the terrifying sounds coming from the hallway and the library. Mr. Otis does not take his words seriously at all, explaining that he does not believe in ghosts and

remains interested in buying Canterville Chase. During this conversation, Mr. Otis also points out his family's American origin and explains that if ghosts really existed, one would surely be exhibited in an American museum. At this moment the difference between the perception of Lord Canterville and Mr. Otis can be seen because Lord Canterville represents the British aristocracy, which takes traditions very seriously, and Mr. Otis the American pragmatism, according to which everything is possible, even a ghost exposed in a museum. At the end of the season, the entire Otis family, moves into Canterville Chase and the reader learns more about the family members. The head of the family is Mr. Otis and his wife, Mrs. Otis, their eldest son is called Washington, the middle child is Virginia and the youngest twins have only the nickname 'Stars and Stripes'. When the family arrives at Canterville Chase, the weather begins to deteriorate rapidly, creating a sense of mystery and suspense for the reader. Upon arrival, the family meets the housekeeper Mrs. Umney. Lord Canterville asks Mr. Otis to employ Mrs. Umney, as she has worked at Canterville Chase for over fifty years, and he agrees. In the house, Mrs. Otis notices a stain by the fireplace and alerts Mrs. Umney to clean it up. Mrs. Umney explains the history of the stain, which was caused when Sir Simon de Canterville murdered his wife on that very spot in 1575. Sir Simon disappeared later after the incident, and his body was never found. Furthermore, Ms. Umney explains that it is his ghost that has haunted Canterville Chase ever since and that the stain, which is a big draw for tourists, cannot be removed. Washington Otis doesn't believe their housekeeper's story and starts removing the stain with 'Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent'. The stain disappears very quickly but suddenly everyone hears a great thunder and Mrs. Umney faints from fright. Mr. and Mrs. Otis are upset that their new housekeeper fainted during a work shift and debate whether to continue employing her. Eventually, they decide to take it out of her salary. Mr. Otis's response to the thunder is a criticism of the weather in England, which he believes is caused by overpopulation.

In the second chapter, the family begins to question their opinion that the ghost does not exist because the bloodstain appears by the fireplace every new morning, even after Washington cleans it the day before or Mr. Otis locks the room. When this happens several times, they admit that the legend about the ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville must be true, but despite all this, they are not afraid and continue to live in Canterville Chase, as if



nothing had changed. Dinner follows, during which the family surprisingly does not talk about the Canterville ghost, but only about topics related to American society, such as which American actresses are more successful than others, growing corn, or what importance Boston has for the development of the world. On the same day during the night, Sir Simon decides to frighten the inhabitants of the chase for the first time. He walks down a corridor with heavy rusty chains that make a scary sound and wakes up Mr. Otis. Annoyed by the sound, Mr. Otis decides to go out into the hallway, where he sees Sir Simon for the first time, whose appearance is terrifying. Mr. Otis offers him the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator, which is supposed to stop the chains from rattling and asks Sir Simon to use it so the family can continue to sleep. Such a comment makes the ghost incredibly angry, he grabs the bottle of liquid, throws it on the ground and leaves the corridor. As he walks away down the hall, twins dressed as ghosts in white sheets jump out at him and throw a pillow at his head. Shocked, Sir Simon de Canterville quickly moves to his secret chamber where he reflects on what just happened. To calm himself, he recalls his achievements during the ghost's career, such as when he blew out the pastor's candle, who came out of the library late at night and was so frightened that he had to be under constant supervision of his doctor, or when he knocked on the window with his green hand and the butler who saw it later shot himself. He decides to not let anyone humiliate him like this and vows to take revenge on the family.

The next morning after the incident, the ghost is the main topic of discussion. Mr. Otis is unhappy that Sir Simon did not want to take the bottle of lubricating oil from him. Subsequently, the third chapter continues in a calm spirit and nothing much happens, only every morning the family finds a stain by the fireplace, but it is always a different colour, Washington removes it during the day, and it repeats. The family finds it amusing, in the evening they even bet what colour the stain will be the next day. Only Virginia is melancholic about the whole stain situation and finds nothing entertaining about it. Sir Simon de Canterville gradually loses patience and decides to try to scare the Otis family again. He tries to put on the armour, which is found in Canterville Chase but it is too heavy. The family members think it is a robbery when they hear a crash and Mr. Otis goes to check on the situation holding a gun in hand. Instead of the thieves, he discovers a ghost sitting on a high-backed chair, chafing his knees and his facial expression is showing great pain. When the twins see Sir Simon, they start shooting at him with their toy guns, and unfortunately for

him, they are very accurate. Sir Simon is completely annoyed by such behaviour and runs away down the stairs. During the escape, he remembers the consequences of his devilish laugh for the former owner and decides to use it on the Otis family, so he begins to laugh devilishly on the stairs and at that moment, Mrs. Otis in her nightgown, who does not recognize it as a laugh that should make her feel terrified and thinks that the ghost is just having intestinal problems, offers him some medicine. Sir Simon wants to turn into a big black dog but when he hears that Mr. Otis and the twins are coming, he prefers to go to his hidden chamber through the wall. When he is finally alone in his chamber, Sir Simon is disappointed that he no longer has the strength to wear the armour, as it is too heavy, his knees buckle, and he falls to the ground. Due to his next failure, which worsened his mental and physical condition, he decides to stay in bed for a few days and devise a new plan to get revenge on the Otis family and scare them to death. His plan is to put on a costume, grab a rusty dagger, and sneak into the room of Washington, who constantly annoys him by cleaning the stain by the fireplace every day. When Washington sees him, the ghost will stab himself three times in the neck and Washington will be completely terrified. After his mission of haunting Washington is complete, he will enter the bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Otis, put his dead arms around their necks, and whisper spooky secrets from the grave into their ears. For the twins he plans to lie on their chests, causing them to gasp and panic. However, it is hard for him to come up with something for Virginia because she always treats him with respect. On the day when he is finally full of strength and ready to carry out his plan, he meets another ghost in the corridor, which frightens him immensely and he quickly runs back to his chamber to hide under the covers. Sir Simon has never seen another ghost, so he is extremely terrified by such a situation and does not know how to react. This situation is very comical because Sir Simon's intention is to frighten the other residents of the house, who, thanks to their American attitude, do not react the way he imagines, and the only one who becomes really scared by a ghost is Sir Simon de Canterville himself. During the night, he thinks over everything that happened and realizes that having another ghost in Canterville Chase may not be harmful at all as they can haunt together. He decides to talk to him the next day. When Sir Simon is on his way to find the other ghost, he discovers that it is only an imitation of the ghost set on him by the twins. Sir Simon is greatly upset and vows that after the rooster crows twice that morning, he will hurt someone from

the Otis family, but for some unknown reason, the rooster only crows once, and the disappointed Sir Simon returns to his chamber.

The fourth chapter begins with the Canterville ghost being exhausted from all his failures and he even stops renewing the stain by the fireplace every day to avoid contact with the Otis family. Since Sir Simon de Canterville represents the aristocracy and the honouring of tradition, he still has certain obligations which he must fulfil, even if he does not wish to, such as appearing in the hallway once a week and droning unintelligibly from the arched window on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Another of his duties is to rattle his chains when he haunts the hallway, and because he does not want to draw attention to himself, he always takes off his shoes and even secretly takes Mr. Otis's Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator to lubricate his chains. He certainly does not enjoy the situation of having to use anything from the materialistic Americans, but on the other hand, it serves the purpose of being able to quietly haunt the corridors. Although he does his best to avoid being discovered by the family, the Otis twins constantly set various traps for him, such as a string across the hall or soap on the stairs. As some of their attempts are successful and Sir Simon has bruises on his body and is also in severe pain, he decides to try to scare the twins again. The ghost ponders for a long time what costume would best terrify the twins and finally decides on the so-called 'Headless Earl', due to the great success he has achieved with this costume in the past. When he is ready for action, he notices that the door to the twins' room is ajar, so to make a bigger show he slams the door with great force, and as he stands between the frames, a pitcher of water falls on his head. Shocked, he runs away to his hidden chamber and gets cold. The Canterville ghost feels miserable and ill. One day when he is noticeably better, he decides to go to the fireplace to see if there is any relic of the stain, which he had kept there for many centuries. When he gets to the fireplace, he is surrounded by the twins and Washington holding a garden hose. Sir Simon escapes to his chamber through the chimney, arriving at the location completely filthy. After this incident, Sir Simon abandons all his duties and spends all his time hidden in his chamber. This even makes the Otis family think that the ghost has left their house for good. Mr. Otis writes a letter to Lord Canterville boasting that the ghost has finally been banished and Lord Canterville congratulates him. The twins still believe that Sir Simon is hiding somewhere and so they shrug off the trap setting, and the rest of the family resumes their lives as if nothing

has changed. One day, the Otis family invites the young Duke of Cheshire, whose family has been haunted by Sir Simon every time they set foot in the castle for centuries, to spend the night there. The moment the ghost registers him, he decides to come at night to scare the Duke of Cheshire, who wants to be in Canterville Chase mainly because he is in love with Virginia and as the ghost prepares himself to leave his chamber, he remembers the twins and rather cancels his plan.

In the fifth chapter, Virginia and the Duke of Cheshire are riding horses and she tears her clothes, for which reason she does not want anyone in Canterville Chase to see her, and goes through different corridors than usual, where she meets Sir Simon. The Canterville ghost watches nature from the window and looks very sad, therefore Virginia tries to reassure him that her brothers will soon leave to Eton and he will not be terrorized anymore as long as he behaves properly. Although she is not just being nice to him, she also confronts the ghost with the fact that she has heard from Mrs. Umney that he murdered his wife. Sir Simon de Canterville admits that it is wrong to murder someone but explains that he had his reasons because his wife was ugly, could not cook or take care of the household. Afterward, he explains that after his gruesome crime, he was imprisoned by his brothers-in-law in a secret chamber where he starved to death. When Virginia hears the story, she is shocked and immediately offers him a sandwich, whereupon the ghost replies that he has not eaten in three hundred years and Virginia's eyes are filled with tears. Because he is very pleased by her gesture, Sir Simon begins to compliment Virginia, explaining that she is much kinder than the rest of her family. This upsets her since she will not allow anyone to criticize her family and accuses him of stealing her paints to create a new stain by the fireplace every day, to which the ghost admits, and she also threatens that she will tell her daddy to extend her brothers' holiday for another week so they can continue to terrorize Sir Simon. Subsequently, Sir Simon explains that British aristocrats have blue blood, and she could never understand that, so they argue because each has a different opinion of American culture. After this debate, the ghost begs Virginia for help, explaining that only she can save him. To rescue him, she must weep for his sins and pray for him, while probably seeing some terrifying creatures that will whisper evil things to her. If all turns out well, she will recognize it by the almond tree in the garden starting to bloom. Virginia is very brave, agrees to help him and they both disappear.

The Otis family is ready for dinner, but no one can find Virginia. The Duke of Cheshire joins the search, despite Mr. Otis's forbidding, because of his love for Virginia. The main suspects are a group of gypsies that Mr. Otis has allowed to camp near Canterville Chase. When they arrive at the location, the gypsies are gone and it is clear that they left in a hurry. In the middle of chapter six, the group finally runs into the gypsies and discovers that Virginia is not with them. The gypsies are displeased about the situation because they feel grateful to Mr. Otis for letting them settle on his property, so four of them even decide to help in the search. The mission is unsuccessful, and everyone returns home in a melancholy mood. All the family members are devastated by the loss of Virginia. Suddenly they hear a huge crash and see Virginia coming out of the wall holding a small casket. They cheer and Virginia explains what happened and how she got the casket containing the precious jewels from the ghost for helping him finally pass away. She tells them how Sir Simon was murdered and shows his hidden chamber where his skeleton is chained to the wall, and next to him lies a glass which probably contained water a long time ago and a bowl covered with a layer of dust. The two vessels were placed in such a distance that the body chained to the wall could not reach them. While the others were examining Sir Simon's skeleton, the twins shouted that they could see from the window the almond tree beginning to blossom, and Virginia cried joyfully that God had forgiven him his sins and let him die.

The first part of the last chapter takes place at a funeral organized by Lord Canterville and attended by the whole Otis family and even Mrs. Umney. As Sir Simon's coffin is placed in the ground, Virginia lays a cross she made from an almond blossom on it. After the ceremony, Mr. Otis tells Lord Canterville that Virginia has a box of valuable jewels that originally belonged to the ghost but should now be given to Lord Canterville, because he is aware of the importance which British aristocracy places on inherited property. Since there is no mention of the jewels in the will and no one even knew of their existence, Lord Canterville insists that for bravery and a good heart, the jewels should belong to the owners of Canterville Chase and mainly to Virginia. Another reason is that Mr. Otis bought Canterville Chase with both the ghost and all his property. Virginia and the Duke of Cheshire get engaged and the wedding takes place in the spring of 1890, attended by the Queen of England herself. Virginia is complimented on the jewels she had received from Sir Simon. Virginia's father, Mr. Otis, has doubts about the marriage at first, because he does not

believe in the value of any hereditary title, but right after he realizes that aristocracy is also connected with great wealth and changes his mind. When the newlyweds return to Canterville Chase after their honeymoon, the Duke of Cheshire wants to know what happened while they were looking for Virginia, but she refuses to answer. Virginia loves him but explains that she must not tell anyone and that she has learned that love will always be stronger than death. The Duke of Cheshire is pleased with this statement and most of all because he can finally be with his beloved Virginia and indicates that he would like to have children with her.

## 6.2 *Gothic elements in the story*

When the Otis family first arrive at Canterville Chase, clouds begin to appear in the sky, and it starts to rain. Just like in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, after Mr. Hyde beats a man to death and the police go to arrest him one morning, it is foggy and cloudy outside, or when Coraline is exploring the area around her new home at the beginning of Gaiman's *Coraline*, it is also rainy and very foggy. Like in many other Gothic stories using dark settings, Sir Simon's attempts to scare the family take place primarily at night, making a spooky atmosphere and increasing the tension for the reader. As mentioned in the first chapter of this bachelor thesis, the main attributes of early Gothic literature include the specific setting, often medieval buildings. In *The Canterville Ghost*, the plot takes place in Canterville Chase, and a similar pattern also appears in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto*. Another technique often used by authors of Gothic literature to gain the reader's attention and, at the same time, to alert them that something important is about to happen is the disturbing sound of for example the thunder or rattling of a chain. In *The Canterville Ghost*, this also occurs before Virginia appears in Chapter Six: the clock is ticking, and the family hears a loud crash of thunder. The short story is set in England, which is also common in Gothic literature, because the location is usually in a Christian European country, just like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *Coraline*. The reason why most Gothic literature is set in Europe is partly because of its origin and also because of the setting in old castles and chateaus, which are typical features of Europe and hardly found on other continents.

Many major themes of *The Canterville Ghost* are intertwined with conventional themes of Gothic literature, such as death, or fear. Sir Simon, for example, is imprisoned by his wife's brothers in a hidden chamber of the castle where he starves to death. Yet he does not really die but persists as a ghost through centuries. At the end of the story, he wishes for help from Virginia so that he can finally die and have peace. He tries to induce fear in the new inhabitants of Canterville Chase. The feelings the ghost experiences are anger, desire for revenge, disgust, and contempt for the Otis family, all of which are frequently circulated emotions in Gothic characters. The importance of reputation, which Sir Simon perceives and tries to defend at all costs, can also be seen for example in the character of Dr. Jekyll in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, who wants to get rid of the bad side of his character that could spoil his reputation, so he devises a way to change into another person and not suffer the consequences of his actions. Another recurring element in *The Canterville Ghost*, as well as in many other Gothic literature, is irony. Irony is used in the situation where the ghost wants to scare the family but sees the figure of another ghost in the corridor, which was created by the Otis twins, so he gets scared and runs away, or when he wants to surprise the twins by suddenly bursting into their room in a scary disguise, but is in the end shocked when a jug of water is poured on him. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* there is also an element of irony when at the end of the story the main character Dorian wants to destroy his portrait, but the reality is that the image remains intact, and he dies. On the other hand, one very important component of Gothic literature not frequently used in *The Canterville Ghost* is mysteriousness because apart from not knowing what happened during the time Virginia was with Sir Simon and the others were trying to find her, everything is explained. It is also a type of parody, because by explaining almost everything, the author mocks the exaggerated mystery and supernaturalism of Gothic literature. Due to the fact that the characters of Sir Simon de Canterville, Lord Canterville and the Duke of Cheshire represent the British aristocracy, one of the main themes are property and inheritance just as in the books *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *The Castle of Otranto*. Many of the traditional Gothic works take place in the past; in *The Canterville Ghost*, the past is constantly referred to by the ghost, speaking about history, and also revived in the costumes that also include knight's armour or other historical clothing.

One of the other Gothic themes is the family and the relationships between family members. For example, Sir Simon, who belongs to the same parentage as Lord Canterville, haunts his family members for centuries and has no qualms despite the fact that some of his actions lead to their death. The characters of Gothic literature often show how brave they can be in some situations, like Virginia, who wants to help the ghost despite the fact that what happens during the rescue process can be scary and even dangerous. The theme of bravery also appears in the book *The Castle the Otranto*, when Isabella refuses to marry Manfred, or in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as Emily decides to run away from the castle. In modern children's literature with Gothic elements such as *Coraline*, the main character is trying to save her parents regardless of the fact that she exposes herself to great peril. Nevertheless, brave characters in Gothic literature are not always women. In the sixth chapter, when Virginia is lost, the Duke of Cheshire decides, despite his respect for rules, to break the forbiddance of Mr. Otis and join the search and puts himself in danger. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Du Pont also helps to rescue Emily from the castle, and in *The Castle of Otranto*, Theodore tries to protect Isabella from King Manfred.

The theme of love that develops between Virginia and the Duke of Cheshire also fits into conventional storylines in Gothic literature, as well as marriage or rejection. The love link can be seen, for instance, between Valancourt and Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, between Theodore and Matilda in *The Castle of Otranto*, and in Emily's unwillingness to marry Manfred. In *Frankenstein*, which was written during the romantic period, as in *The Canterville Ghost*, there is a conflict between the individual and society, because just like Sir Simon who belongs to aristocracy and is not understood by the American family, neither the monster created by Viktor Frankenstein for the reason of his creepy appearance can fit into society. Many of the main characters in Gothic literature are negative characters, supernatural beings, or people with supernatural powers. While Frankenstein's monster created from parts of dead bodies murders innocent people in order to take revenge, Sir Simon de Canterville is a ghost who, due to respect for tradition and the belief that the purpose of a ghost's existence is to haunt, scares several people to death and is proud of it. Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* is a vampire, who is also responsible for many dead. Mr. Hyde in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, who is an evil version of Dr. Jekyll, beats an innocent man to death. Dorian Gray from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, murders an



innocent artist Basil Hallward after showing him a portrait. In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, the witch Beldam, otherwise known as 'the other mother', imprisons innocent children.

Family curse, haunted buildings, and the generally dark history of a mansion are other common features of Gothic literature. They appear in *The Canterville Ghost*, where Canterville Chase is haunted by a ghost, and also in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which the castle of Udolpho has a dark past, as the owner Signora Laurentini had inexplicably vanished. Chateau Le Blanc, the residence of Marquis and Marquise de Villeroy, who dies suspiciously while husband subsequently disappears and is never seen again, is also associated with eerie noises coming from the bedroom.

In *The Canterville Ghost*, many typical elements of later Gothic literature are found. Later Gothic does not usually take place in the past but rather reflects the problems of contemporary society, such as superficiality, poverty, overpopulation, or precisely as in *The Canterville Ghost*, the misunderstanding between Americans and the British. The readers also learn a lot about Sir Simon's feelings and how his psyche is affected by the twins' behaviour, spoiling his efforts, or the fact that no one is afraid of him. The fact that the ghost is ultimately the one who is most afraid is surprising because he is meant to be terrifying and people are supposed to be scared of him and therefore show emotions while he does not. Sir Simon even experiences his emotions very strongly and such exaggeration is part of the parody to make the situation more comical to the reader.

### **6.3 *The characters***

The main character of the book is the supernatural being Sir Simon de Canterville, also known as the Canterville Ghost. Sir Simon belongs to the noble family line of the Cantervilles and was himself the owner of Canterville Chase several centuries ago. In 1584 he murdered his wife and when her brothers found out what he did, they chained Sir Simon to the wall in a hidden chamber and left him there to starve. After his death, Sir Simon de Canterville became a ghost and since then he must haunt all the inhabitants of the castle. He is described as having long grey hair, eyes like flames, and torn robes. He takes his duty to scare the inhabitants of the castle very seriously; he even has several disguises that he uses for this purpose and is quite proud of all his successes in the ghost career and their

consequences, when the frightened person, for example, goes crazy or dies. After the Otis family moves in, everything changes, because they have no fear of the ghost and rather make fun of it. In general, the relationship between Sir Simon and the Otis family shows the struggle between the British aristocracy and American pragmatism, caused by the misunderstanding of the other side. Sir Simon lives under the assumption that it is the duty of the ghost to frighten and terrify the inhabitants of the house, when the Otis family are not afraid of him, he gets even tougher and has no understanding for their ignoring him. At the same time, the Otis family have no understanding for Sir Simon's history of haunting and see it as something disruptive. Unlike the members of the Otis family, the Canterville ghost is easily terrified and angered. The Otis twins are the main initiators of the torment of the ghost, who takes it very personally and always promises them revenge. When Sir Simon is exhausted of the Americans, and tired of making a new bloodstain by the fireplace every day, which Washington will remove immediately anyway, he must continue to observe some ghostly traditions because they are part of his identity, even though he does not enjoy them. The meaning of life has disappeared for him and so he asks Virginia, the daughter of Mr. Otis, to help him die. Sir Simon explains to Virginia that he murdered his wife because she was ugly and could not take care of the household. Such banal reason for the murder, can be seen as a part of the parody. The ghost, however, feels that the motive for the crime was sufficient and feels injustice from being left to starve to death:

“My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery. [...] However, it is no matter now, for it is all over, and I don't think it was very nice of her brothers to starve me to death, though I did kill her.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 43)

The head of the Otis family is Mr. Hiram B. Otis, who works as an American minister and becomes the new owner of Canterville Chase at the beginning of the book. His wife is Mrs. Otis, and their children are Washington Otis, Virginia E. Otis, and the Otis twins called Star and Stripes. He often compares American and British cultures and identifies primarily with American culture because of his origins. He claims for example that the poor weather in Britain is caused by overpopulation, which may be, in a way, the author's attempt to ridicule Americans by trying to point out their lack of education by having Mr. Otis say something so illogical. The character of Mr. Otis manifests the stereotypical way of life and thinking of Americans, for instance, when he hears an explosion, he immediately takes a gun to go and investigate the place. His and Mrs. Otis's American patriotism is also seen in the names they

chose for their children. Still, he respects that tradition is important to the aristocracy, and when the twins throw a pillow at Sir Simon, he reprimands them for it. After rebuking them, nevertheless, he shows his confidence when he declares that if the ghost continues to disturb them with the rattling of chains again, he will take them away from him. When the castle was sold to Mr. Otis, he was alerted to the existence of a ghost by the former owner Lord Canterville, but he did not believe it at all and downplayed the warning. He even compared the ghost to a commodity and showed no interest in the Canterville Chase's past. On the contrary, he tried to persuade Lord Canterville that America was a modern nation:

“My Lord,' answered the Minister, I will take the furniture and the ghost at a valuation. I have come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; [...] I reckon that if there were such a thing as a ghost in Europe, we'd have it at home in a very short time in one of our public museums, or on the road as a show.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 4)

Whenever Mr. Otis sees the ghost, he is always completely calm and not afraid of it. In such situations, his pragmatic thinking comes into play. When there is the problem caused by chain rustling, he offers Sir Simon a product to stop it. The reason why the ghost does not scare him could be that he does not realize what abilities the ghost can have and sees him more as a piece of Canterville Chase furnishing. He does not really even notice the ghost himself but only the physical phenomenon, the sound that makes his family unable to sleep.

“My dear sir,' said Mr Otis, 'I really must insist on your oiling those chains, and have brought you for that purpose a small bottle of the Tammany Rising Sun Lubricator. [...] I shall leave it here for you by the bedroom candles, and will be happy to supply you with more, should you require it.’” (Wilde, 2019, p. 15)

During the first chapter, when Mrs. Umney faints from fear after a big thunder, the reader can notice that Mr. Otis is not very empathetic. Instead of wondering if the housekeeper is okay, he is angry and wants to deduct it from her salary, which mirrors his selfishness, American materialism, and his attitude to Mrs. Umney, seen as an inferior employee, or even as another commodity that came with the house. They apparently do not want to establish any deeper relationship with her.

“My dear Hiram,' cried Mrs Otis, what can we do with a woman who faints?'  
'Charge it to her like breakages,' answer ed the Minister; 'she won't faint after that'; and in a few moments Mrs Umney certainly came to.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 10)

As mentioned before, he never shows much emotion, such as fear when seeing the ghost, but he is very emotional when his daughter Virginia goes missing, and overjoyed when she reappears. Although he is very pleased that his daughter is alright, he is strict with her and reproaches her for not letting him know about helping Sir Simon, thus making it clear that he is the head of the family, and the others must obey him.

“Good heavens! child, where have you been?’ said Mr Otis, rather angrily, thinking that she had been playing some foolish trick on them. [...] You must never play these practical jokes any more.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 55)

When Mr. Otis finds out what precious jewels Virginia received from the ghost, his uprightness shows, and he decides to return them to Lord Canterville. With this gesture, he proves respect for the aristocracy, as he knows that inheritance is extremely important to them, but he also proves himself to be a fair businessman who will not take something that does not belong to him. This situation may be surprising because the reader would probably expect this kind of behaviour from an aristocrat rather than Mr. Otis.

Speaking of his wife, Mrs. Otis, the reader learns that as a young woman she lived in New York, her birth name was Miss Lucretia R. Tappan, and people admired her beauty. She is happy that they moved to England and even states that the only difference between the two countries is the language. This statement may seem ridiculous because the reader can tell from Mrs. Otis' attitude that she is being serious, because it is possible that she does not actually understand British English and perceives it as a foreign language, which again reflects the lack of education of Americans. When Mrs. Otis notices a bloodstain by the fireplace upon arriving at Canterville Chase, she shows no interest in why the stain is there or fear, and only wants Mrs. Umney to clean it up. This proves her American pragmatic mindset of seeing a problem and wanting to solve it:

“Suddenly Mrs Otis caught sight of a dull red stain on the floor just by the fireplace, and, quite unconscious of what it really signified, said to Mrs Umney, 'I am afraid something has been spilt there.'

'Yes, madam,' replied the old housekeeper in a low voice, 'blood has been spilt on that spot.'

'How horrid!' cried Mrs Otis; 'I don't at all care for bloodstains in a sitting room. It must be removed at once.'" (Wilde, 2019, p. 8,9)

During the whole story, it is obvious that she loves her children very much and is very caring all the time. Her efforts to help and care are also shown in her only interaction with the ghost. When Sir Simon tries to scare the inhabitants of the house with his demonic laughter, Mrs. Otis assumes that he has digestive problems and offers him some medicine. This reaction of Mrs. Otis again breaks the Gothic conventions because instead of being afraid of the ghost, she wants to help and offers another American product, just as it happened in the situation with blood stain.

Washington Otis is the eldest son of Mrs. and Mr. Otis. He is named after an important general, politician and the first American president, George Washington, which proves that his parents have a very strong relationship with America and admire its history. Washington does not like his name very much. His significant character traits are persistence, and, similarly to his parents, pragmatic thinking. His pragmatic thinking is especially evident after Mrs. Umney explains that the bloodstain is there because Sir Simon de Canterville murdered his wife here and that it cannot be removed. Washington does not believe it and is trying to remove it immediately with an American product. The long name of the product, which appears in the sample, sounds almost like an advertisement, as the idea of someone in real life mentioning the full name of a product seems very unnatural.

“‘That is all nonsense,’ cried Washington Otis; ‘Pinkerton’s Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time,’ and before the terrified housekeeper could interfere, he had fallen upon his knees, and was rapidly scouring the floor with a small stick of what looked like a black cosmetic.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 9)

A sign of his persistence is that he removes the stain every day as it is refreshed by Sir Simon. What the reader can learn about Washington is that he is a good-looking young man, whose weaknesses are gardening, the English aristocracy and that he was working as a prominent dancer in America or in London.

The middle child of Mr. and Mrs. Otis is Virginia E. Otis. Virginia is a fifteen-year-old girl who has a talent for riding a horse or pony and is the only one of the children who does not bully Sir Simon. She has big blue eyes that reflect her bravery and is labelled as ‘Amazon’, which probably points to her hidden warrior spirit. In some situations, Virginia can be very caring and sensitive; for example, when the ghost tells her that he starved to death, she

immediately offers him a sandwich or, when she finds out that the ghost has not slept for 300 years, she almost cries with regret. Yet when she first has a discussion with Sir Simon, she points out that the actions he had committed are terrible and even threatens him when he starts criticizing her family. Such behaviour in a young girl meeting a ghost, also an old and experienced man, is in great contrast to Gothic character conventions. Traditionally, the elders teach and the younger just follow their rules. Nevertheless, when the ghost asks her for help, she agrees, despite the possible danger, and shows her bravery. The Duke of Cheshire loves her from the beginning but when he proposes to her for the first time, she turns him down, proving that she follows her own mind and will not be manipulated by anyone.

The youngest members of the Otis family are the Otis twins. Readers do not learn their names as the story progresses, only that their parents and siblings call them 'Star and Stripes.' Their nicknames may be related to their parents' patriotism, but also to the fact that they are troublemakers: because Mr. Otis has to punish them often, they sometimes have bruises and scratches on their backs. The main activity they happily do throughout the story is bullying Sir Simon and setting all sorts of traps for him. Interestingly, when the Otis twins create a ghost out of a sheet, they put a label on it written in Old English, trying to mock the ghost. The reason why the label is written in Old English may be that the twins know that Sir Simon was born several hundred years ago and want him to understand the text, or because they perceive British English to be so archaic that they do not even consider using modern English.

“Ye Onlie True and Originale Spook.  
Beware of Ye Imitationes.  
All others are Counterfeite.” (Wilde, 2019, p. 30)

They always do everything together and readers do not learn about them individually. Both are very mischievous and do not take most things their parents tell them seriously. When Virginia, who they both like, goes missing, they try to be helpful and take it very earnestly.

Lord Canterville is of the same lineage as Sir Simon de Canterville, and he sells Canterville Chase to Mr. Otis at the beginning of the short story. Since he represents British aristocracy, he is upright and honours traditions. This can be seen, for instance, in his warning Mr. Otis of the ghost rampaging before he sells Canterville Chase to him, or refusing

to accept the jewels that Virginia receives from the ghost for saving him. He believes that they do not belong to him and in spite of all that the ghost has done to the Canterville family, Lord Canterville, out of respect arranges a dignified funeral for him.

Duke of Cheshire is a young aristocrat who is deeply in love with Virginia. He may appear too sensitive for an aristocrat, but he is still very young so his tears in reaction to Virginia's rejection can be understood. Another characteristic of his is perseverance because he never gives up on his love for Virginia. When Virginia goes missing, he is courageous and wants to join the search despite Mr. Otis's forbiddance and possible danger. He is young, impulsive, in love and is convinced that he must find and save Virginia at all costs:

"'I'm awfully sorry, Mr Otis,' gasped out the boy, but I can't eat any dinner as long as Virginia is lost. Please don't be angry with me; if you had let us be engaged last year, there would never have been all this trouble. You won't send me back, will you? I can't go! I won't go!" (Wilde, 2019, p. 52)

Another character who is of British origin and takes the history of the Canterville family very seriously is the housekeeper Mrs. Umney. She is an elderly woman, wearing a black silk dress, a white bonnet, and an apron. She honours tradition and always treats the new owners with reverence and respect.

#### 6.4 *Gothic, or mock-Gothic?*

Sir Simon de Canterville is a parody himself because he displays more human behaviour than most members of the Otis family. Several times throughout the short story he is angry, afraid, proud, in pain, promises revenge, or feels sad about his failures. It is comical that eventually the ghost who is supposed to terrify others is the one who is most scared. The monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* also has similar human perceptions and feelings, being sad that he is alone, angry at his creator, and vowing revenge, as well as learning to read. Such behaviour may evoke sympathy with and, above all, pity for the supernatural being, even though both Sir Simon and the monster created by Victor Frankenstein murdered several innocent people. The Canterville ghost, moreover, shows no remorse for his actions and is quite proud of them. It can be compared with Dorian Gray in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, who rejected Sibyl Vane, a girl who fell in love with him and subsequently committed suicide, but he has no regrets of it. This can evoke feelings of misunderstanding in the reader and a negative view of the character. The main reason why

the reader feels sympathy for the ghost and forgives him for the crimes he has committed is probably that the reader perceives the ghost as an old man who has been punished by haunting people for several centuries and also because he is bullied and ridiculed by members of the Otis family. There is a fascinating contrast between the ghost behaving and feeling more like a human and his appearance, which complies with the typical visage of a terrifying gothic ghost. We can say that Sir Simon deviates from the classic early Gothic characters, who were either evil or good. Another example of parody in *The Canterville Ghost* can be exaggerated respect for tradition.

Mr. Otis, Mrs. Otis, and their eldest son Washington parody Gothic characters by their way of reacting to certain situations. For example, when they see a ghost, they are not afraid of it, which is what the reader would expect from a typical Gothic character. In general, they all have very similar behaviour, which exaggerates American materialism and pragmatism. None of them is interested in history, but deal with the present, physical phenomena, and operate in a way that when they see a problem, they want to solve it immediately and look for quick, practical solutions. When the ghost rattles the chains, Mr. Otis offers Sir Simon a product to stop the sound. When shown the bloodstain on the floor, Washington immediately starts trying to clean it. And finally, when Mrs. Otis hears ghost's demonic laughter and thinks he has digestive problems, she immediately offers him some medicine.

The character of the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Otis Virginia takes on many of the characteristics of young girls in early Gothic literature as she seems vulnerable, inexperienced, possibly a little naive, intelligent, empathetic, and willing to risk her health by putting herself in a dangerous situation to help someone else. What makes Virginia different from these typical characters, is the missing connection with nature. When she finds herself in a tense situation, her courage and intellect are proven. For example, in the situation where she is proposed to by the Duke of Cheshire and refuses him, she shows feminine strength, which is also typical of young Gothic characters and occurs for example in the book *The Castle of Otranto*, when Isabella does not want to marry the ruler Manfred. Virginia's conversation with Sir Simon is, a part of the parody, because the reader can get the impression that she is bringing him up and chastising him for the way he behaves and what



he says, even though she is younger than him and should show respect to him according to not only Gothic tradition. The whole story ends, however, typically in the style of Gothic romance, because in the course of the story Virginia falls in love with the Duke of Cheshire and at the end, they get married, just like Emily St. Aubert and Valancourt in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

The Otis twins, like their older brother Washington and their parents parody typical Gothic characters by disrespecting tradition and having no fear of the supernatural. However, they take on many of the classic characteristics of children in not only Gothic literature, such as being playful, clever, curious, and always thinking of new ways to trick Sir Simon. When their father rebukes them, they do not take it seriously and mostly follow their own discretion, which can have consequences, like in 'The New Mother' where the kids were naughty and did not want to listen to their mother, and she left them for it.

The Duke of Cheshire and Lord Canterville are both typical Gothic characters, specifically from early Gothic period. They are aristocrats, respect traditions, are well-spoken, and always behave properly. The Duke of Cheshire seems to me very similar to the Valancourt from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, who is also brave, respectful of elders, persistent, deeply in love, and sensitive due to his young age. Like Valancourt with Emily, the Duke of Cheshire is also devoted to Virginia throughout the whole story and wants to marry her.

The character of the housekeeper Mrs. Umney has also some of the typical characteristics of Gothic figures, but they are so emphasized that they become parody. Gothic characters are afraid of the supernatural, but the situation when Mrs. Umney faints after hearing struck of thunder, seems almost comical. Since the main characters of the original Gothic literature were mostly nobles living in medieval castles and chateaux, servant figures are found in most of them. These characters as well as Mrs. Umney are devoted to their employers and also often tell the main figures about the history of the place. This happens, for example in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where the old housekeeper at Chateau Le Blanc, Dorothee, tells Emily St. Aubert about the strange mysterious death of Marquise Villeroi. The parodical difference in *The Canterville Ghost* is that the members of the Otis

family are not interested in the history of the Canterville Chase or Sir Simon at all. They find it neither interesting nor mysterious and tend to ignore the past altogether.

## 7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the main goal of this bachelor thesis was to describe in detail the characters appearing in Oscar Wilde's short story *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) in comparison with traditional Gothic characters, to highlight their behavioural features and appearances and to determine whether they adhere to or parody the conventions of the Gothic genre. In order to find the answer to this question, it was necessary to define the basic characteristic of Gothic literature and to distinguish the main features of early and late Gothic literature. The books *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, and *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis were used to characterize the original Gothic literature and its characters. The Description of the typical features of later Gothic literature and its characters is based on *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde. Another important division of characters was according to their gender and age into male, female, and children, which also have their recurring features in Gothic literature.

To better understand why Oscar Wilde portrayed the characters in the short story *The Canterville Ghost* in this way, a chapter is included in the practical part that deals with the perception of Americans by the British, including Oscar Wilde, during the Victorian era. The analysis of Gothic elements in the story as well as the characters is based on a comparison with *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The characters are then considered in respect to the typical characterisation conventions of the Gothic genre.

The main character of the book is a supernatural being, the ghost Sir Simon, whose appearance completely copies Gothic models because he looks very scary. On the other hand, inside he is very sensitive, feels pain and acts more like a human than like a supernatural being in traditional Gothic literature. The other main characters are the members of the Otis family who come from America. In contrast to the behaviour of Sir

Simon, who expresses his emotions, the Otis family think very pragmatically, rationally and have no fear or respect for the supernatural. Through this contrast Oscar Wilde parodies typical elements of Gothic literature and, at the same time, mirrors the problem of misunderstanding between cultures, which often happens not only between Americans and Brits, both in literature and in everyday life. The story reflects Oscar Wilde's view of both America and Americans and the declining power of aristocracy in Great Britain.

Although the book is many years old, it is in my opinion timeless because such cultural misunderstandings still happen between people today. Finally, interesting aspect is the comparison of the story with traditional works of Gothic literature from the point of view of the reader, where the reader normally shares emotions, such as fear with the main characters. In contrast in *The Canterville Ghost* the reader feels more sympathy for Sir Simon despite the terrible deeds he has committed than for the characters who are haunted by him. Each character is definitely unique, and humorously illustrate Oscar Wilde's view of Gothic literature and at the same time shows how the author plays with common expectations that readers of Gothic literature may have.

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