Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích

Pedagogická fakulta

Katedra anglistiky

Bakalářská práce

The Graveyard Book, The Canterville Ghost: proměny gotického žánru v dětské próze

Transformations of the Gothic genre in the Context of Children´s Literature

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České Budějovice 2023

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Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce je proměna gotického žánru a jeho parodií v literatuře pro dětské čtenáře. Práce se v teoretické rovině zaměří na charakteristiku gotického žánru v průběhu staletí s ohledem na dynamiku gotických prvků v dílech dětské literatury a poté v interpretační rovině přejde k literární analýze text románu pro dětské čtenáře *The Graveyard Book* současného britského autora Neila Gaimana. Práce si klade za cíl porovnání a literární analýzu textu *The Graveyard Book* s textem parodie gotického románu Oscara Wildea *The Canterville Ghost* a pokusí se zhodnotit přínos a oblibu gotického žánru v současné britské próze.

Klíčová slova: Gotický žánr, parodie, Gaiman, Wilde, dětská literatura

Abstract

The subject of the bachelor thesis is the transformation of the Gothic genre and its parodies in literature for children's readers. On the theoretical level, the thesis will focus on the characteristics of the Gothic genre over the centuries with regard to the dynamics of Gothic elements in works of children's literature and then, on the interpretive level, will proceed to a literary analysis of the text of the children's novel *The Graveyard Book* by the contemporary British author Neil Gaiman. The thesis aims to compare and literary analyse the text of *The Graveyard Book* with the text of Oscar Wilde's parody gothic novel *The Canterville Ghost* and attempts to assess the contribution and popularity of the gothic genre in contemporary British prose.

Key words: Gothic genre, parody, Gaiman, Wilde, Children's literature

Poděkování

Rád bych poděkování věnoval vedoucí mé práce, PhDr. Alici Sukdolové, Ph.D. za všechny cenné rady, její trpělivost, ochotu a veškerá doporučení. Dále také za její komunikaci a pomoc s veškerými potížemi.

Contents

1 Introduction

The Gothic genre has long been recognized for its ability to create dark and eerie atmospheres, explore the human psyche, and induce fear in readers. Children's gothic literature uses gothic elements along with humour and playfulness to help the child reader face their own fears and anxieties.

This bachelor thesis deals with the transformations of the gothic genre and its parody in literature for children's readers. The thesis focuses on the transformation this genre has undergone over the centuries and examines the Gothic elements in literary works. The aim of the thesis is to examine how the Gothic genre, its motifs and narratives have changed over the years and provide a broader understanding of the changes and importance of the Gothic genre in children's literature.

In the theoretical part, the thesis introduces the reader to the Gothic genre, its tradition, and its appearance in children's literature. It discusses the Gothic elements and motifs that are prominent in the genre and their significance. The thesis also explores the relationship between humour and the Gothic, as humour is a key feature of Gothic literature for young readers.

In the practical part, the thesis focuses on the contemporary children's novel *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman and the parody of the Gothic genre, novel *The Canterville Ghost* by Oscar Wilde. Through comparative analysis, the practical part highlights the Gothic elements present in both works and provides an in-depth examination and comparison of these elements.

2 The Tradition of the Gothic novel Genre

In the theoretical part, the thesis focuses on the characteristics of the Gothic genre with regard to the dynamics of Gothic elements in works of children's literature. First, the thesis focuses on introducing the reader to several specific Gothic elements and motifs, which it describes in more detail. In particular, these are those motifs that can be observed and analysed in the works of Oscar Wilde and Neil Gaiman whose works are further discussed in this thesis.

2.1 Gothic in Children's Literature

Arguably we can claim that the way we understand childhood today is inflected by Enlightenment and Romantic ideas of childhood, however, there has been so many changes to children's literature, and it has evolved so much since the eighteenth century it can be seen as a completely differed from its previous form. Children today would be more interested in reading books children used to read before a literature specifically created for children was developed. For example, children nowadays would like to read folklore Gothic stories, but during the Enlightenment era children were warned against reading these stories, because according to Locke they were terrifying and were supposed to keep the children in obedience.[1]

Gothic fictions are stories about dark, gloomy, and supernatural people and events. It is usually full of dark atmosphere, distortions of reality, and mystery. These elements aim to have a certain emotional impact on the one reading them. Gothic texts often trigger a sense of fear, unease, and uncertainty in the reader because they deal with themes such as death, horror and the supernatural. This creates tension and suspense as the reader finds themselves in a world where the lines between the natural and the supernatural are erased. This genre often creates an atmosphere of mystery and darkness because it is meant to induce fear in the reader. Readers are drawn into the story and its eerie and disturbing setting, which plays with reader's emotions and creates a sense of empathy for the main hero or heroine. The genre began in England in the eighteenth century but achieved two of its greatest successes in the nineteenth century with Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula.* Gothic novel is a type of fiction that originally preceded horror stories. Another form

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[1] Anna Jackson et al. *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, p.2

of gothic fiction called Supernatural fiction is a genre of fiction that is concerned with ghosts and hauntings [2] which can be seen in both *The Graveyard Book* and *The Canterville Ghost.*

During the Enlightenment period, i.e., 1685 – 1815, religion was replaced by rationalism, which relies on facts and evidence, as the dominant way of explaining the world and relations between what was explainable and the supernatural. Gothic works can be seen as a reaction to the fear and anxiety that arose from this shift. These works can be seen as an attempt to deal with the uncertainty that came with the many changes in the 18th century such as urbanisation, industrialisation, and revolution. These changes resulted in individuals feeling separated and disconnected from their erstwhile knowledge. They would cope with this feeling by reading various stories about the supernatural. Gothic works can therefore be viewed as response to these changes, where individuals found comfort in reading unsettling and eerie stories about the world surrounding them.[3]

The Gothic, however, is more than just a set of reoccurring unsettling motifs and eerie narrative: it is a language, often an *"anti-historicising language, which provides writers with the critical means of transferring an idea of the otherness of the past into the present.*"[4] The absence of knowledge about what is going to happen is a necessity in the Gothic genre, because it provides opportunities to create the tension and mystery that are both fundamental for the Gothic genre. This obscurity is also linked to the rejection of the ideas of the Enlightenment, which is one of the main features of Gothic literature. Some of the most convincing interpretations of Gothic scenarios focus on the late 18th century crisis, where characters try to solve strange and unexplainable events using their senses and previous knowledge of the world which then creates an epistemological crisis.[5]

Adult Gothic has been a subject to critical attention, and the popularity of Gothic narratives has been analysed in various studies such as Mark Edmundson's *Nightmare on Main Street,* however although Gothic in children's literature today is mainstream

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[2] Lewis Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (UPNE, 1999), p. 62

[3] Botting, *Gothic*, p.22 – 23

[4] Sage, Victor and A. L. Smith, eds. (1996) *Modern Gothic*, p.1

[5] Ibid, p.7

surprisingly it has received almost no critical attention at all.[6] Since the creation of children's literature, it has existed within what Zohar Shavit calls a "literary polysystem". This system divides children's literature into two categories: acceptable and unacceptable. Acceptable texts are those that are suitable for children, such as educational and moralistic texts, and are expected to be read by them.[7]

When children learned to read, they were encouraged to read educational and moralistic texts that contributed to the development of character and morality. Such texts include the metrical verses of the Psalms or the *Bible*.[8] These texts are considered beneficial for children's development. On the other hand, unacceptable texts typically involve unsettling themes, such as death, horror, and evil. This includes the Gothic genre, which has been seen as not appropriate for children, as it often deals with those unacceptable themes. [9] Although Gothic belongs to what is categorised as unacceptable or unsuitable, it seems that children have always been attracted to such texts.

Mythical creatures such as ghosts and other supernatural beings, haunted places and other features of the Gothic were always something children would like to read about. As Townshend argues, this phenomenon was supported by their nursemaids as they used frightening stories that induce fear to effectively keep the children's behaviour under control. In the eighteenth century the Gothic narrative was transformed into a genre for adult readers, when it had been part of the children's literature the whole time.[10]

Gothic in children's literature is famous for its direct and straightforward use of common Gothic figures and features. A gothic tale usually takes place in an outdated location. Within this space occur creatures of the supernatural realm. For example, the presence of ghosts has been an inseparable part of children's literature ever since its inception. However, their function and form has changed over time. Whilst in some texts they might appear as frightening creatures, in others they might be comic or even harmless (as in *The Canterville Ghost* by O. Wilde) or even friendly and caring (as in *The Graveyard Book* by N. Gaiman).

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[6]Anna Jackson et al. *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, p.1

[7] Ibid, p.2

[8] Hunt, p.6

[9] Jackson, p.1

[10] Ibid, p.2

Other Gothic symbols are creatures of the night called vampires (*Dracula* by B. Stoker). The element of vampire is also present in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book.* The vampire, however, has a long history, both as a literary device and as a signifier in culture. The curse of the creature comes from the insatiable urge to drink human blood. The British Romantic conception of the vampire is indebted to the writings of George Gordon, Lord Byron. Byron contributed to the development of the literary concept of vampire only late in the evolution of the myth. *The Giaour* (1813) gives a description of the vampire as a Gothic "herovillain", cursed to wander forever without hope of forgiveness, hatred for the only thing which allows his existence, and doomed to drain the blood of his female relations. [11]

Gothic novel is generally agreed to have originated with *The Castle of Otranto (1764)* and believed to have reached its peak in the late 19th century when R. L. Stevenson's wrote *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the year 1886 and when Stoker published *Dracula (1897).*[12] The Gothic is a genre concerned with uncovering "real" terrors behind surface appearances and properties (evident in fictions such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian* Gray), or with establishing the reality of what's supposedly supernatural (as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula).*[13]

As Dale Townshend argues in *The Haunted Nursery,* children's literature appeared as a genre in reaction to the popularity of the adult Gothic. Gothic romances like *The Castle of Otranto, The Monk,* or *The Italian,* with their aim on the perverse and the forbidden were inappropriate for children though. Instead, the child reader of the eighteenth century was more likely to be led towards educational texts.[14]

According to Walpole's peers, the Gothic era was a long period where civilization was barbaric, superstitious, and anarchic. This period spanned from the fifth century AD, to the Renaissance and the revival of classical learning. In a British context it was even considered to extend to the Reformation that happened in the sixteenth century.[15] Similarly as in the 1790s, the 1890s, offered a resurgence of Gothic fiction, particularly

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[11] Marie Mulvey-Roberts: *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, p.243

[12] Crandal Nadia, *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, p.39

[13] *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, p. 182

[14] Jackson, p.1

[15] Hogle, J. (Ed.). (2002). *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge Companions to Literature). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.21

in prose narrative, highlighted by Gothic stories which are now seen as classic, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890–1891)* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *"The Yellow Wallpaper"* (*1892).*[16] It was in the 1900s that the Gothic expanded the most in its history, in various forms of expression. Films, ghost stories, women's romance novels, television, romantic and satirical musical plays, games, music videos, etc. were all an innovative form of the Gothic genre.[17]

2.2 Victorian Fairy tales in relation to Gothic

There have always been stories that children have particularly enjoyed reading, and it is now common to trace the origins of children's literature as a genre back to the marketing of children's books in the 18th century, which usually dates back to 1744 with the publication of John Newbery's *A little Pretty Pocket Book*.[18] We can say that children's literature as a distinct genre, which is characterised by a specific audience, that is, the child, and which is further characterised by specific stylistic and formal features, is better dated to the Golden Age of children's literature in the Victorian era, that is, between 1837 and 1901.[19]

In 1865, Lewis Carroll came up with his book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which is significant for children's literature because it is known to today's children and is still read by them. It is therefore the first such work of children's literature. In this story, when the main heroine Alice falls down a hole, she suddenly appears in another world. The hole ergo serves as a portal for traveling between different "dimensions," which is an element that is also found in stories of the Gothic genre. There is thus the possibility that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* could be classified as one belonging to the Gothic genre; however, given the elements it contains, it is a didactic text that was in fact designed to replace the Gothic genre.[20]

In Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, Wilde tried to reflect the modern life in a way that would be distant from reality. His inspiration from Hans Christian Andersen when writing this collection of fairy tales is evident.[21] Although

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[16] Hogle. p.1

[17] Ibid, p.2

[18] Jackson, p.2

[19] Ibid, p.3

[20] Jackson, p.3

[21] Hunt, p. 140

they are labelled as fairy tales and are intended for children, oftentimes they deal with decadent themes and are more likely to be understood by an adult reader. For example, a story called *Nightingale and the Rose* tells the story of a student who is in love with a girl who promises to dance with him in exchange for a red rose. However, red roses do not grow in his gardens, and because a nightingale hears his lamentations, she decides to help him in the name of love. Getting the red rose, however, requires the nightingale's death, which for her is a small price for true love. When the boy discovers the rose and joyfully carries it to his beloved, she rejects him because another boy has given her jewels. So, the student throws the rose into the street and goes back to his philosophy studies, thus the nightingale's death comes in vain. Love is described in this story as a mysterious but beautiful thing, but ultimately it is more associated with suffering and death. Although it is not classified as a Gothic story, it does contain elements characteristic of the genre.

2.3 The Relationship between Gothic and Humour

Unlike texts from the Victorian era, many contemporary texts combine "horror" and "humour" and Gothic. However, it was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that the comic Gothic genre became so dominant. An example of the comic Gothic genre which combines fears with humour, is Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events.* The series tell a story of three kind children named Violet, Klaus, and Sunny who lost their parents and whose lives are filled with bad luck and misery. The only family member who can take care of the three children is their mean guardian Count Olaf whose only intention is to gain their inheritance.[22]

 James and the Giant Peach (1961) is a popular children's novel by British author Roald Dahl. Similarly, as in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* it tells a story of an orphaned boy James who is forced to live with his cruel guardians Aunt Sponge and Aunt Spiker.[23] The absence of one or both parents occur frequently in Gothic stories or in stories with Gothic elements as it emphasizes the unsettling atmosphere and having no parental guidance allows children to make their own decisions by which they learn and also form identity. However, the humour in Gothic tales for the child reader

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[22] Cross Julie, *Frightening and Funny: Humour in Children's Gothic Fiction*, p.57

[23] Ibid, p.57

often relies on understanding irony, as incongruous forms of humour, where the reader's expectations are not met, are the domain of this type of humour.[24]

This form of incongruity between expectations and what actually happens in the story is also evident in Oscar Wilde's work, *The Canterville Ghost*, where the reader would expect the family to be frightened upon encountering the ghost, but the reality is quite different. The relationship between the Gothic and humour appears frequently in children's fiction and is believed to have a psychological and therapeutic function. Children who read about their unspoken fears find it much more beneficial than any other stories in that regard, as it can help with assuaging fears and anguish.[25] Humour accompanied by laughter helps children to deal with their own fears such as abandonment, social exclusion, or death.

In the aforementioned example of *James and The Giant Peach*, we can see the use of grotesque characters to release laughter. Aunt Sponge, who is short and fat, and Aunt Spike, who is long and thin[26], are examples of the recurring scheme of mocking characters. This contrasting pattern can also be seen in the example of Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* or Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*. The function of humour in Gothic Reading for Young Readers is therefore crucial as it helps to lighten the atmosphere and at the same time offers children the opportunity to deal with their own fears and anxieties. The contrast between humour and the Gothic is also important in *The Graveyard Book*, although it contains a myriad of Gothic elements, it is not intended to be a horror story, but rather as a fantasy story about the formation of identity, the experience of unimaginable adventures and the importance of family and friends.

2.4   Decadence Gothic and Contemporary Children's Gothic

As already mentioned, with the end of the 19th century the Gothic genre reached its greatest peak. The three seminal works, *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* were all published in the same decade, all of which pondered the same question, *"How much can one lose and still remain a man?"*[27]

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[24] Ibid, p. 58

[25] Ibid, p. 59

[26] Ibid, p. 59

[27] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p. 1

This issue is evident in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, where the protagonist's character reflects a real fear of the later Victorian era, related to the Jack the Ripper phenomenon. In this now classic work, Stevenson works with the duality of one's personality. The character of Mr Hyde is an alter ego of Dr Jekyll, reflecting his devilish desires that are otherwise buried within him as he has been repressing them for a long time. Since it is only a part of Jekyll's personality, the depiction of Mr Hyde as a dwarf serves as a symbol. As Hyde gradually takes more and more control and it is beyond Dr Jekyll's abilities to stop him, the only way out can be found in death.[28]

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde portrays the problematics of the double self, which here, as in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, is at the epicentre of the story. Dorian Gray remains young and beautiful while his picture ages and reflects his moral decay. Although the two works share the same themes, the main gothic element differs. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde "relies upon and even exploits public anxieties about scientific progress and about the direction of this progress if undertaken in the absence of moral guidance"*,[29] whereas *The Picture of Dorian Gray* addresses the quest to achieve immortality.[30]

Another work which deals with the dangers of scientific progress, and which is very close to Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and also to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, is *The Island of Dr Moreau* by H. G. Wells. The setting in which the story takes place, as the title suggests, is the *Island of Dr Moreau*, who is conducting experiments in which he combines humans with animals in an attempt to create beast-man, a species inferior to men. Morality and obedience are shaped here through pain. *"The Island of Dr Moreau represents a confluence of old Gothic themes of aspiration and dominance, the fears about human status and dignity generated by Darwin and images of white imperialism in its decline."*[31]

In Stevenson's work, the problem is closely tied to the main character's profession. As a doctor, Jekyll is in a high-ranking profession, which is associated with respect and for which he must suppress his inner desires. In the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde focuses on the aristocratic lifestyle and primal cruelty. Dr. Moreau represents the attempt to create a new society which would be in conformity with his own

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[28] Ibid, p. 4

[29] Ibid, p.3

[30] Ibid p. 1

[31] Ibid, p. 13

ideology, and which would be better than the existing one, but ultimately somewhat resembles it. Thus, all the texts focus on the theme of morality and its decline, often linked to the influence of society.[32]

Stoker's *Dracula* deals with Victorian era taboos and blurs lines drawn by society as the main character stands for structural oppositions. There is no particular sexual content, but the motif of sexuality is explicit. In contrast to Dracula's desire for physicality is the desire for love. Dracula represents the attractive unknown that is associated with the concept of "new women" who are sexually independent, and with female passion. The motif of immortality, which is here associated with vampirism, is what it has in common with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The immortality however comes with a high price of losing one's own soul.[33] In conclusion all these texts from the late 19th century centre upon horror, supernatural, decay of one's personality, moral ambiguity and social issues.

In the 20th century, the Gothic has been preserved mainly through film adaptations of classic works, which then appeared on cinema screens. Science fiction, which has for a long time been closely linked to Gothic fiction, has brought various adaptations of the Gothic. However, modern science fiction is drifting away from the original concepts of the Gothic.[34] Large part of the early twentieth-century Gothic literature resembles styles of the later nineteenth-century writing. In the work of Franz Kafka from the first half of the 20th century we can observe Gothic elements that fluctuate between terrors of self-hatred and social estrangement. Darker Romantics such as Shelley and Poe also focus on the problematics of self-hatred and social exclusion.[35]

Another contributor to this genre in the 20th century was Roald Dahl. Although his works did not initially find success in Britain, but only in America, they are now considered part of the world's literary culture. He began writing for children in the 1960s, but adults have had mixed reactions to his work. On the one hand, his style, grotesque villains, and well-defined characters, met with success; on the other, they were considered bizarre or even unethical. In 1983, he published *The Witches*, which, although criticized for its depiction of misogyny, was adapted several times into films and

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[32] Ibid, p. 15

[33] Ibid, p. 22

[34] Botting, *Gothic*, p.156

[35] Ibid, p. 160

became a popular children's reading.[36] Supernatural elements or a frightening atmosphere are an integral part of both this work and the Gothic genre, indeed the title itself suggests that this will be a story in which Gothic elements are to be expected.

In 1997, the phenomenon of British author J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series was published. Although it is not specifically a gothic work, but a work of fantasy fiction, it contains countless gothic elements. The first is the absence of parents. Harry's parents were murdered when he was a young boy, and thus he never had the opportunity to meet them. The very beginning of the story contains two elements of the gothic genre – death, or more specifically murder, and the absence of a parental guide.

Like in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, we follow the story of young Harry Potter whose parents have been murdered and whose murderer is constantly trying to kill the protagonist, which he initially failed to do. As in Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, there is the motif of the ghastly guardian, in this case Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, who complicate the little boy's life and who treat him like an inferior being. The story takes place for the most part in the world of witchcraft and magic and in a wizarding school where there are talking pictures and the ghosts of deceased wizards. There are however more supernatural creatures such as Dementors, werewolves and animagi. As the protagonist ages, the stories take on darker tone, the number of dead increases, and the storyline becomes increasingly more frightening and eerie.

In 2002, Neil Gaiman contributed to the Children Gothic with the publication of a novella *Coraline*. The work follows the character of Coraline, who is unsuccessfully seeking attention from her neglectful parents. For the Children's Gothic genre, as already alluded, the absence of parental figures is frequent. Coraline discovers a secret door through which she enters an alternative world that seemingly offers a better life. However, she soon discovers that the ruler of this realm, known as "The Other Mother", is only attempting to deceive her. The ghosts of children, initially depicted as victims, play a key role in Coraline's triumph over the evil force.[37]

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, formerly psychologically useful stories degraded. While traditional Gothic for adults offered a combination of motifs that created a suitable setting for the emergence of a new hero, modern conceptions of

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[36] Hunt, p. 307

[37] Dominik Becher, *Ghosts – or the (Nearly) Invisible: Spectral Phenomena in Literature and the Media*. Peter Lang. ALPH: Approaches to Literary Phantasy 9.

fairy tales and stories have abandoned the Gothic elements that functioned as a mirror of children's own experience. The abandonment of the traditional conception of fairy tales and the change in narrative, have caused fairy tales to be either abandoned altogether or to require revisions that do not, however, fulfil the needs that are necessary for effective psychic work. All these changes form a kind of gap. This newly created, unused space offers the conditions for the use of Gothic in children's literature.[38]

While traditional Gothic prioritizes more the haunting setting itself, the supernatural elements, and the fragility of the soul, contemporary Gothic literature for young readers places more emphasis on relatable heroes or heroines, their journey to find their own identity, their fears, and moral lessons. Gothic elements such as frightening settings or supernatural creatures still remain active and continue to play an important role by creating room for a thrilling and suspenseful story. Furthermore, this kind of reading is enriched with elements of humour that serve to ease the atmosphere and help children deal with their own fears and anxieties

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[38] Karen Coats, *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, p. 79

3 Comparative Analysis of the Contemporary vs Classic Gothic Fiction

In the interpretational analysis, the thesis centres upon the text of the contemporary children's novel *The Graveyard Book* by the British author Neil Gaiman and compares it with the text of the parody of the Gothic genre novel *The Canterville Ghost* by Oscar Wilde. The aim is to consider the gothic elements present in the two selected novels and compare the modern and traditional approach to the sense of the Gothic.

3.1 The analysis of The Graveyard Book

The young adult supernatural novel *The Graveyard Book* explores Gaiman's idea of a boy who is being raised by ghosts in a graveyard, after having escaped from a house, where the rest of his family had been murdered by a murderer called Jack. After having found a sanctuary at a local cemetery the boy is adopted by a family of ghosts, Mr. and Mrs. Owens. His surrogate family names him Nobody Owens. "*He looks like nobody but himself," said Mrs Owens, firmly. "He looks like nobody." "Then Nobody it is," said Silas. "Nobody Owens."* [39]

Apart from his surrogate family, Nobody Owens, gets to know various inhabitants of the graveyard, including his personal guardian Silas, who is within the story suggested to be a vampire, as he is not dead nor alive. Bod is given the Freedom of the Graveyard which allows him to gain abilities like those only ghosts possess such as disappearing in the shadows, being able to see in the dark or to induce fear. The Freedom of the Graveyard also allows him to leave the cemetery, which is an ability the ghosts do not possess. But he is not advised to leave the cemetery, because it is beyond the gates of the cemetery that the real danger awaits him. The murderer of his family, who is trying to finish what he started – to kill Nobody – is out there. The Freedom of The Graveyard ensures he is invisible to all mortals unless he wishes otherwise. This ability protects him from the outside world, and therefore from the murderer Jack.

Throughout his stay at the cemetery Nobody undergoes various adventures, the greatest being a victorious defeat of the murderer of his family. The book follows his story since being a toddler to the age of fifteen years old, when Bod prepares for his new life chapter – the life in the world of living – therefore leaving the cemetery.

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[39] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, p. 19

3.1.1   Neil Gaiman: The Contributor to Contemporary Children Gothic

Neil Gaiman is a multiple award-winning author of comics, children's books, original graphic novels, nonfiction books and prose novels, radio plays, short stories, and television and movie scripts. Gaiman was born on November 10, 1960. His family was Jewish and originally came from Poland before they settled near the south coast of England. Neil always enjoyed reading books by C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Edgar Allan Poe.[40]

He found his inspiration in the work of Rudyard Kipling. *"First, foremost and for ever: I owe an enormous debt, conscious and I have no doubt, unconscious, to Rudyard Kipling and the two volumes of his remarkable work The Jungle Book. I read them as a child, excited and impressed, and I've read and reread them many times since."*[41] When he was 12 years old, his teacher, Reb Meyer Lev, who was interested in the stories from Jewish mythology, shared these stories with Neil, who then used ideas from many of these ancient myths in his own writings.[42] After getting started as a journalist, Gaiman met Alan Moore, a comic book writer who encouraged him to write comics, making Gaiman to soon turn his attention towards this field. It was the DC Comics series *Sandman* that eventually secured him his reputation as one of the most original creators to have ever worked in that field.[43]

During the 1990s, while Gaiman's three children were growing up, he tried writing in various formats. He started writing novel for adults called *Good Omens*, with the writer Terry Pratchett. The work he did with Pratchett, the popularity of the novel, and his ever-growing reputation from his work in comics, laid the groundwork for his next novel-length work *Neverwhere*, published in 1997. His writing ideas were affected by his fatherhood therefore his first children's novel, *Coraline*, was written by Gaiman for his daughter Holly. It took him 11 years to finish the book, and during that time he moved to the United States. After publishing, *Coraline* spent more than a month on the New York Times bestsellers list, and the paperback edition hit the list the following year.[44] Gaiman's work brings the genre of Gothic to various age groups in children's literature, from his picture book (*The Wolves in the Walls, 2003),* to his preadolescent

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[40] Baker, B. (2007). *Neil Gaiman on His Work and Career.* Van Haren Publishing.

[41] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, acknowledgements

[42] Guillain, C. (2010). *Neil Gaiman: Rock Star Writer (Culture in Action) (Illustrated ed.) [E-book].* Raintree.

[43] Baker, B. (2007). *Neil Gaiman on His Work and Career*. Van Haren Publishing.

[44] Ibid

fiction *(Coraline, 2002),* to his work for young adults (the *Sandman*). Gaiman often combines humour and horror, which has been the legacy of the Gothic since its inception and it notes the close relationship between fear and humour.[45] The boundaries between what is morally right and wrong and good and evil are well-defined in Gaiman's work, and even if the evil force comes, the hero or heroine solves the problem and overcomes it.[46] In *The Graveyard Book*, we see this division of the lines between good and evil on the example of The man Jack, who is inherently evil and has no redeeming qualities, while the dead, who are actually living, are good and offer the little boy a shelter .The fear children read about and the adventures they undergo within the books, might divert children's attention from their real-life fears, but at the same time, these stories can also help them with understanding their own fears better, and help them become more brave and less fearful. [47]

In the year 2008, Gaiman published two books, *Odd and the Frost Giants* and *The Graveyard Book*. The second one is a story of a young boy whose parents and sister were murdered and who spends his entire youth in a cemetery among ghosts and other mythical creatures and goes through a great number of spooky adventures throughout his life. It contains all the elements that are characteristic for the Gothic genre. The book won the Newbery Medal a year after its publication in 2009. Gaiman also won the Carnegie Medal in 2010 and the book was reviewed as *"The best book Neil Gaiman has ever written"* by Diana Wynne Jones, an English novelist, literary critic, and short story writer.[48] The plot of the book is set in two worlds – the world of the living and the world of the dead. As can also be seen in his other work *Coraline,* the scenery and differences between the two worlds help the main protagonist to mature, find his meaning of life and his true self.

3.1.2 Exploring the Gothic themes and characters of The Graveyard Book

Gothic features of *The Graveyard Book* occur significantly. The setting itself highlights the atmosphere of a gothic supernatural horror novel. The graveyard, where the main character grows up, is described as an uncanny spooky place, filled with tombs, gravestones and ghostly inhabitants. Behind each tombstone is the story of the

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[45] Karen Coats, p. 78

[46] Ibid

[47] Wagner et al. *Prince of Stories: The Many Worlds of Neil Gaiman*

[48] *The Graveyard Book* Back cover

deceased, with whom Nobody often talks, as they are his only friends. All these elements combined, serve to heighten the sense of mystery and apprehension. As said in the acknowledgments of the book, the author claims that the graveyard was inspired by Highgate Cemetery West. *"Artist and author Audrey Niffenegger is also a graveyard guide, and she showed me around the ivy-covered marvel that is Highgate Cemetery West"*[49]. Gaiman also states that it was his son Michael who inspired him to write the story. *"My son Michael inspired this book. He was only two years old, riding his little tricycle between gravestones in the summer, and I had a book in my head. Then it just took me twenty-something years to write it."*[50]

Despite being an essential element of the story and another gothic symbol, the murder of Nobody's parents and younger sister does not get a detailed description within the story. It had already happened beforehand. The author opens the story with the murder rather than introducing the main character. *"The knife had done almost everything it was brought to that house to do, and both the blade and the handle were wet. The hunt was almost over. He had left the woman in her bed, the man on the bedroom floor, the older child in her brightly coloured bedroom, surrounded by toys and half-finished models. That only left the little one, a baby barely a toddler, to take care of."*[51] However, this event helps with creating the petrifying and mysterious atmosphere within the story and can therefore be considered as another significant gothic symbol. It also gives the reader the opportunity to get familiar with the main villain of the story as it gives a description of his actions, behaviour, looks and his abilities.

The motif of death, which is a central motif to almost every gothic story, is also prominent within the storyline. Gaiman explores the theme of death through the main character, who only knows the world full of death and the world of the living remains unknown for him until the very end of the story. Since Bod is orphaned and surrounded and raised by ghosts, he learns to accept death as an inevitable part of everyone's life. His foster parents and all his friends, that is except for his only living friend Scarlett, are ghosts or other supernatural creatures and because of this relationship with the dead, he learns not to fear it and see it simply as another part of one's journey. With Man Jack trying to kill Nobody and finish what he had started many years ago, the

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[49] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, acknowledgements

[50] Ibid

[51] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, p. 3

presence of death always follows the footsteps of the main protagonist. The danger that would normally be present in the world of the dead is still there, however the real danger awaits in the realm of the living as only there Jack can finish his task.

It is safe to say that the inhabitants and creatures Bod encounters throughout the story have major impact on his development. Although the residents of the graveyard try to be his support and friends, Nobody still remains the living boy who has no other option but to spend his childhood with the ghosts of dead people. Despite being very close and having a family-like relationship, Nobody yearns for human companionship. As the world outside of the graveyard represents too much risk and danger, he cannot leave the gates of it, at least not for too long, which of course complicates all his efforts to make new friends. This isolation from the world he naturally belongs to, but had no chance of exploring, thus makes him more eager to be part of it. The world from which he came, and which he was excluded from because of the circumstances, represents being an outcast of one's own society.

Although he has found a sanctuary in the new world, he still remains an outcast, since deep down he knows that he does not belong there, as he is the only resident of the graveyard who is alive. His only link to the world of the living is his only human friend Scarlett. Their friendship is unique not only because she is his only living friend, but also because she is the only companion who is similarly aged. Their relationship was born out of mutual understanding. When Nobody and Scarlett meet, we can see how the separation from the world of the living has affected him. Bod does not know his own age as birthdays are not celebrated in the world of the dead. Through the story, their relationship deepens, but at the same time, the differences between them are gradually revealed, which are so great that they can never be completely bridged. Although their life paths separate for a time when Scarlett and her family move away and Nobody must stay in the cemetery, their friendship endures even after years of separation.

There are many inhabitants of the graveyard with supernatural origins such as ghosts, werewolf, or Nobody's guardian Silas who lives among the dead but is not dead himself. Throughout the story the reader never gets to know what creature Silas exactly is, however, his abilities, aversion to daylight and the fact that he is not dead nor alive, strongly suggests that he is a vampire. Despite his dark past: *"I have not always done the right thing. When I was younger…I did worse things than Jack. Worse*

than any of them. I was the monster, then, Bod, and worse than any monster."[52], Silas is in the book portrayed as a provider but mostly a caring kind hero with solicitude for the main character. He also brings another supernatural creature to the graveyard, Miss Lupescu.

Miss Lupescu is brought to the graveyard whenever Silas is missing for a longer period of time, and she is supposed to take care of Bod and to be his teacher. Nobody does not like her at first and wants Silas to come back as soon as possible, so that he does not have to spend more time with miss Lupescu. He also hates the food she makes for him. The symbol of bad food as a means for a mischief can also be seen in Gaiman's *Coraline.* Despite initially not having the best relationship with Miss Lupescu, after being saved by her, Bod finds his way to her, and they create a strong bond. She is revealed to be a werewolf, or more specifically the Hound of God. Werewolves also referred to as Lycanthropes (from Greek words for wolf, *lykos*, and man, *Anthropos*) are creatures of the moon. Lycanthropy covers the idea that the cursed becomes an animal. Werewolf stories recur throughout history, through Greek and Norse myths, Latin literature, medieval lays, and sixteenth-century trials where the belief in the actual transformation was taken so seriously, that the accused could be executed for crimes committed while in the wolf form.[53]

In the majority of literature and stories Lycanthropes are seen as creatures upon which a dreadful curse had been casted however Gaiman takes a different approach when he turns the curse into a blessing or a gift: *"Those that men call Werewolves or Lycanthropes call themselves the Hounds of God, as they claim their transformation is a gift from their creator, and they repay the gift with their tenacity, for they will pursue an evil-doer to the very gates of Hell."*[54] Within the story Miss Lupescu fulfils her purpose when she saves Nobody from the Ghouls and when she fights alongside Silas and Nobody against the Jack Frost and The Jacks of All Trade.

She as well becomes the hero of the story after saving Bod several times and sacrificing her own life protecting Bod. *"How did Miss Lupescu fall?" "Bravely,"* said Silas. *"In battle. Protecting others." Bod's eyes were dark. "You could have brought her back here. Then I could have talked to her."*[55] Werewolves and vampires are often

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[52] Ibid, p. 285

[53] Mulvey-Roberts, p. 198

[54] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, p. 88

[55] Ibid, p.271

portrayed as creatures with everlasting rivalry. However, in *The Graveyard Book*, Silas and Miss Lupescu are friends and they fight side by side trying to protect Nobody at any cost. Since the book does not explicitly define what kind of creature Silas is, but only hints at the possibility that he is a vampire, the absence of this predetermined rivalry can be therefore explained simply by stating that it does not deal with a relationship between a werewolf and a vampire but a between a werewolf and another monster.

The most important and most common mythical creatures and another gothic symbol of *The Graveyard Book* are ghosts. They are the first supernatural creatures Bod encounters when he gets into the graveyard as a toddler. He is adopted by his foster ghost parents after being given The Freedom of The Graveyard by The Lady on the Grey. For a moment the reader also gets to know the murdered family as his mother plays an important role when she asks the ghost of Mrs. Owens to protect her baby. *"Three figures, two large, one smaller, but only one of them was in focus, was more than an outline or shimmer. And the figure said, My baby! He is trying to harm my baby! "Protect my son!"*[56]. The book therefore displays the monsters (Silas, Miss Lupescu, Ghosts) as the caretakers and humans (The Man Jack) as the villains. The ghosts also possess several abilities such as disappearing in the shadows, being able to see in the dark or the ability to induce fear. What they are not allowed to is to leave the graveyard which is something only Bod and Silas can do. Nobody himself partly becomes a ghost when he is given The Freedom of The Graveyard.

Other Gothic creatures are witches. Witches have played various roles in the Gothic literature such as divination, means of communication with spirits of the dead, performing magic etc. In *The Graveyard Book* Liza Hempstock is a witch who is buried outside of the graveyard in "Unconsecrated ground" known as the "Potter's field." *"I thought you must be," she said. "We've heard of you, even over here, in the potter's field."*[57] Liza claims she was falsely accused of being a witch, and then burned to death 500 years ago, the plot twist however is, that Liza was in fact a witch and she caused everybody who watched her burn to suffer from plague and die. *"A week later and it had taken most of the village, and they threw the bodies all promiscuous in a plague pit they dug outside of the town, that they filled in after." "Was everyone in the village*

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[56] Ibid, p. 10

[57] Ibid, p. 99

killed?" She shrugged. "Everyone who watched me get drowned and burned." [58] The witch is a friend to the main protagonist within the story and eventually she falls in love with him. She wishes that he would not live so that they could be together which is her way of showing love and being romantic. *A voice by his ear said, "Say you'll miss me, you lumpkin." "Liza?" said Bod… Liza's voice, close to his ear, said, "Truly, life is wasted on the living, Nobody Owens. For one of us is too foolish to live, and it is not I. Say you will miss me." "Where are you going? Asked Bod. Then, "Of course I will mis you, wherever you go…" "Too stupid," whispered Liza Hempstock's voice, and he could feel the touch of her hand on his hand. "Too stupid to live." The touch of her lips against his cheek, against the corner of his lips. She kissed him gently and he was too perplexed, too utterly wrong-footed, to know what to do. Her voice said, "I will mis you too. Always."[59]*

As the main protagonist grows older and the reader follows his adventures, Bod is confronted by another mystical creatures – the ghouls. *"One grave in every graveyard belongs to the ghouls. Wander any graveyard long enough and you will find it—water-stained and bulging, with cracked or broken stone, scraggly grass or rank weeds about it, and a feeling, when you reach it, of abandonment. It may be colder than the other gravestones, too, and the name on the stone is all too often impossible to read."[60]*

As three ghouls enter the graveyard, they manipulate and convince Nobody, that life with them is much better and much more exciting than being alone in the grave-yard. It is this manipulation and persuasion why Bod finally agrees to go with them. *"Bod said, "The lady who's looking after me. She makes horrible food. Hard-boiled egg soup and things." "Food!" said the Honorable Archibald Fitzhugh. "Where we're going the food's the best in the whole world. Makes me tum rumble and me mouf water just thinking about it." "Can I come with you?" asked Bod… His three new friends might have been his size, but they were far stronger than any child, and Bod found himself picked up by the Bishop of Bath and Wells and held high above the creature's head, while the Duke of Westminster grabbed a handful of mangy-looking grass, shouted what sounded like "Skagh! Thegh! Khavagah!" and pulled. The stone slab that covered the grave swung open like a trapdoor, revealing a darkness beneath." [61]*

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[58] Ibid, p. 102

[59] Ibid, p.282

[60] Ibid, p.57

[61] Ibid, p. 69

Food is also a very common element of Children's literature fiction. Examples include the huge feasts in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series of books, where food brings a sense of comfort and safety, or Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where food has magical powers in contrast to the traditional tale of *Hansel and Gretel*, where food is a cause for misery.[62] In this part of the story, we can observe a certain parallel between Gaiman's "*The Graveyard Book*" and "*Coraline*", since in both books, food is the reason why the main protagonists decide to go to the Other World in *Coraline* and the realm of the Ghouls in *The Graveyard Book*. This is because both children are dissatisfied with the food they are getting, and the idea of better and tastier food is enough of a driving force for them to enter the world despite their initial doubts and in case of *The Graveyard Book*, despite all the warnings.

Another gothic symbol that can be seen in the book and is covered in its own chapter is Danse Macabre. Various cultures have adapted their attitudes towards death, but they have always maintained the recognition of the continuous cycle of life and death. This acknowledgment ensured that people were more aware of the value of their own lives. In some instances, the perception of death was characterized as the final experience of life, where every person is treated equally, irrespective of their origin or social status. This concept is known as Danse Macabre, or the Dance of Death, where the dead are represented by a rotting corpse or a skeleton, who sees the living off to their final resting place. The origins of Danse Macabre commemorate the dead through funerary dances, honouring the gravedigger, and the didactic lessons via funerary art. All these elements acknowledge the power of death, but they go beyond its literary meaning, and reveal life beyond.[63]

As the story is set in two different worlds, the Danse Macabre is an event allowing the living people and the dead to spend one night together, although they are from different worlds. The dance is a symbol of unity and harmony. They all gather in the Old Town and together they dance. As the event is not scheduled and only happens when a specific flower in the graveyard blooms, this indicates that death can come at any moment. It also reminds the living to live their lives to the fullest. It also suggests that death is inevitable, and it awaits. This can be seen as Bod has a conversation with the Lady on the Grey who is the Harbinger of Death (as indicated in the first chapter

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[62] https://www.bl.uk/childrens-books/articles/food-in-childrens-books

[63] Steven A. Bardon, *Danse Macabre: Origins, Evolution, and Execution*, p. 4

of the book)*: "They knew her, the graveyard folk, for each of us encounters the Lady on the Grey at the end of our days, and there is no forgetting her."* [64] and who also leads the Danse Macabre: *"Now the Lady on the Grey leads us in the Macabray", sang Liza Hempstock.*[65]

When Nobody dances with Lady on the Grey he is amazed by her horse: *"I love your horse. He's so big! I never knew horses can be that big." "He is gentle enough to bear the mightiest of you away on his broad back, and strong enough for the smallest of you as well."*[66] This indicates that death is inevitable no matter your background, money, social status etc. which is referred to as the previously mentioned final experience of life. The dialogue continues with: *"Can I ride your horse?" asked Bod. "One day," she told him, and her cobweb skirts shimmered. "One day. Everybody does."* [67]

The Lady on the Grey also plays part in deciding whether Nobody should stay with the Owens family and ultimately decides that he should when she says: *"The dead should have charity."*[68] The day after the event, Nobody is confused as no one in the graveyard seems to remember the previous night, likewise the people from the world of the living do not seem to remember it either. *"We danced," said Bod. "All of us. Down in the Old Town." "Did we indeed?" said Mistress Owens, with a snort. "Dancing is it? And you know you aren't allowed down into the town."*[69] Later he has a conversation with his guardian Silas about the dance. Silas also claims not to know what he had seen.

When Nobody mentions that he had a dance with The Lady on the Grey, Silas is heartbroken, because this shows Bod's immortality and since Silas is not dead nor alive, he is the only person to never meet The Lady on the Grey at the end of his life. *"We're talking about the Macabray." "I have not danced it," said Silas. "You saw it, though." Silas said only, "I don't know what I saw." "I danced with the lady, Silas!" exclaimed Bod. His guardian looked almost heartbroken then, and Bod found himself*

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[64] Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*, p.24

[65] Ibid p.149

[66] Ibid, p. 150

[67] Ibid

[68] Ibid, p.24

[69] Ibid p. 151

scared, like a child who has woken a sleeping panther. But all Silas said was, "This conversation is at an end."[70]

3.1.3   When Nobody leaves the Graveyard

The end of the story is not so much an ending as it is a new beginning for our main character. Nobody, now a fifteen-year-old boy, is embarking on a new and biggest adventure yet. It is time to leave the graveyard. And although the parting is very emotional, he is now out of danger in the normal world and there is no reason to stay in the cemetery where he only partly belongs. The world of the living has been calling him all this time through Nobody's own desires to get to know it.

During his time in the cemetery, Nobody forms his identity, for it is there that he spent his entire childhood, and by the time the story reaches its end, Nobody is no longer a child. He has made many friends, heard countless stories, and had thrilling adventures, but as time went on, The Freedom of The Graveyard began to fade. Often, he even no longer saw the graveyard ghosts and lost his ability to walk the walls. *"Sometimes he could no longer see the dead. It had begun a month or two previously, in April or in May. At first it had happened occasionally, but now it seemed to be happening more and more. The world was changing."* [71] This change only points to the fact that it's time for Nobody to say goodbye to the Graveyard and its inhabitants and start actually living.

The fact that Nobody is no longer as much of a member of the cemetery as he once was, is suggested by the passage in which the cat and fox that Nobody knew and that knew him run away when they see him: *"At Bod's approach they looked up, startled, then fled into the undergrowth, as if they had been caught conspiring. Odd, he thought. He had known that fox since it had been a cub, and the cat had prowled through the graveyard for as long as Bod could remember. They knew him. If they were feeling friendly, they even let him pet them."*[72]

As he says goodbye to his friends and family, the story comes to a happy ending. And even though the parting is very emotional, he is now out of danger in the normal world and there is no reason to stay in the cemetery where he only partly belongs. And although he will never be able to fully fit into the normal world among normal people

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[70] Ibid, p. 153

[71] Ibid, p.277

[72] Ibid

because of his differences the world of the living has been calling him all this time and it is finally time to get to know it. With suitcase and passport in hand, he leaves the gates of the cemetery and as death is more or less all he knows, it is time for him to get to know real life and what it entails.

3.2   The analysis of The Canterville Ghost

The Canterville Ghost is a popular short story by Oscar Wilde and was adapted for both the screen and stage. It was written during the overlap of the "modern" and the "traditional" eras. [73] It was the first of Wilde's stories to be published, appearing in the magazine *The Court and Society Review* in February 1887. It was later included in a collection of short stories entitled *Lord Arthur Savile's Crimes and Other Stories* in 1891.[74] In many ways, it could be considered a Gothic story since it has many of the elements that are associated with the Gothic genre, such as a large, haunted house, supernatural creature, mysterious occurrences and effects, and sense of mystery and intrigue. Yet the story is also a parody of itself, mocking the definition of what Gothic stands for. Wilde's ghost is far from terrifying, on contrary, the family living in the house is not scared of the ghost at all even when they encounter him face to face. [75]

3.2.1   Oscar Wilde: The Controversial Literary Genius

Born on the 16th of October 1854 Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was an Irish poet and playwright. Both of his parents had good literary taste, which was reflected in Oscar and his older brother thanks to their upbringing [76]. According to his own words: *"Some said my life was a lie, but I always knew it to be the truth; for like the truth it was rarely pure and never simple.*" [77] Oscar Wilde was a complex and controversial figure with many contradictory sides of his personality.

He was born in Ireland and grew up in England, so he had a perspective on both Anglo-Irish and British culture. He is often referred to as an Anglo-Irishman with Nationalist sympathies or Protestant with Catholic leanings. Although he was married and had children he was associated with homosexuality and known for his

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[73] https://www.academia.edu/30320807/THE_CANTERVILLE_GHOST

[74] Sherard, Robert Harborough (1906). *The Life of Oscar Wilde (Abridged)*, p. 454

[75] https://www.academia.edu/30320807/THE_CANTERVILLE_GHOST

[76] Hyde, H. Montgomery, *Oscar Wilde: A biography*, p.1

[77] Raby, Peter (ed.) (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, p.3

relationships with men. He was known for his wordplay and unique language, but he confessed to André Gide that writing was boring and unfulfilling for him. While some facets of his persona were authentic, others were likely exaggerated or created for effect. Although Wilde struggled with blending in society and finding his identity, his works never cease to interest the reader and his personality still intrigues and fascinates. He was the author of works that valued beauty over utility and brought pleasure to the audience of the Victorian era. [78]

3.2.2   Mocking the genre: Horror on the background of humour

The name of the book and it's beginning both suggest that it is another gothic story, however it soon turns out to be a parody of the genre. The cultural differences between British and American people turn the story into something with an ironical and satirical tone. *"There is no such thing, sir, as a ghost, and I guess the laws of Nature are not going to be suspended for the British aristocracy." "You are certainly very natural in America," answered Lord Canterville, who did not quite understand Mr Otis's last observation.* [79] Wilde takes an American family and places them in a British setting, creates stereotypical characters that represent both England and the United States, and presents them as satirical figures, parodying uncultivated tastes of Americans and the British determination to protect their traditions.[80]

Wilde mixes the gothic motives with comedy and satire and therefore downgrades the genre when the frightening, mysterious occurrences are dealt with in a pragmatic and satiric way. The clearly allegorical names of the children—Washington, Virginia, and the Stars and Stripes—suggests that they come from a country in which everything can be bought and treated as a commodity. Wilde uses humour to defuse the tension and atmosphere which is characteristic for a gothic novel. All the supernatural occurrences are treated with humour and often solved in a pragmatic way. This is Wilde's way of dishonouring the gothic genre. Instead of the horrifying climax of the situation (which is expected in the gothic genre), the reader is met with a simple explanation and solution that completely buries the build-up of the creepy atmosphere. An example of this is a situation in which Mr. Otis offers the ghost a lubricant for his creaking

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[78] Ibid, p.3

[79] Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, p. 5

[80] https://www.academia.edu/30320807/THE_CANTERVILLE_GHOST

chains: *"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."*[81]

When Mr. Otis first encounters the ghost that haunts the old mansion, the reader would expect him to be frightened, but instead he acts calmly and finds a rational solution to the situation. This pragmatical approach to every hurdle is widely used within the story as is underlines the characteristics of the American family. Another example is when the reappearing blood stain is taken care of with a stain remover: *"It is the blood of Lady Eleanore de Canterville, who was murdered on that very spot by her own husband, Sir Simon de Canterville, in 1575. Sir Simon survived her nine years, and disappeared suddenly under very mysterious circumstances. The bloodstain has been much admired by tourists and other and cannot be removed." "That is all nonsense," cried Washington Otis; "Pinkerton's Champion Stain Remover and Paragon Detergent will clean it up in no time."*[82]

The ghost is further humiliated when he is forced to steal little Virginia's paints, because the blood is repeatedly cleaned off. The former British residents of the chase were frightened of the ghost and spooky events, however the Americans seem to take a different stand. On this example Wilde portrays the difference between the Americans and the British, showing the pragmatism and materialism of the Americans in opposition to the more traditional approach to things of the British.

According to some scholars, the Gothic style of writing deals with the instability of boundaries and the crossing of physical, social and psychological boundaries. It often blurs the line between horror and comedy, which is encouraged by the hybridity of the text itself. The contrast of effects then creates the possibility of a comedic twist in a story that is primarily supposed to be horrifying. This technique is noticeable in the first gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto (1764)*, written by Horace Walpole. In a letter to a friend, Walpole calls the story a "comic Gothic" and states that if he could make his friend laugh, he would consider it a success, as he was unsure if he could make him

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[81] Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, p. 15

[82] Ibid, p.9

cry. Playing with the reader's emotions allows gothic literature to create a fascinating and thrilling experience.[83]

The gothic setting helps emphasize the contrast between the two cultures by setting the modern American family in a chase representing symbol of British history and tradition. The story takes places in an old English chase called The Canterville Chase, which has all the elements of a typical haunted house. The Otis family is constantly reminded by the seller, that the chase is haunted and full of mysterious supernatural occurrences and that a ghost resides there. However Mr. Otis, the American Minister who purchased the mansion is very sceptical about the presence of the ghost as indicated in: *"I have come from a modern country, where we have everything that money can buy; and with all our spry young fellows painting the Old World red, and carrying off your best actors and prima-donnas, 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."*[84]

The environment in which the story takes place can be considered gothic thanks to the elements it contains and so does the main character of the story, the ghost, whose presence is characteristic of the Gothic genre. Sir Simon Canterville was a 16th-century English aristocrat who lived at Canterville Chase, where he murdered his wife because she was a poor housekeeper and had no cookery skills. *"My wife was very plain, never had my ruffs properly starched, and knew nothing about cookery. Why, there was a buck I had shot in Hogley Woods, a magnificent pricket, and do you know how she had it sent to table?"*[85] As a result, when he died nine years later, he became a ghost destined to haunt the house rather than moving on to a peaceful afterlife. Wilde treats even murder recklessly as he uses bad cooking skills as a motif for murder. The ghost initially enjoyed his fame as the infamous Canterville ghost, but after his unpleasant encounters with the Otis family, he begins to long for peaceful repose. He struggles to drive the family crazy and scare them, as the family finds his attempts and effort rather harmless and amusing. The tables turn as the ghost becomes the one desperate and depressed.

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[83] Mulvey-Roberts, p. 109

[84] Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, p.4

[85] Ibid, p.43

Unlike in *The Graveyard Book*, the ghost is initially bad within the story. He is a mythical creature serving his purpose as a scary entity trying to frighten the new owners of the chase. However, after several unsuccessful attempts and after his efforts came in vain, he proceeds to grieve over himself. This is a significant sign of parody of the genre and the supernatural creature itself. Wilde reversed the situation when he made the ghost, the main protagonist of the book, the one who has to challenge adversity and find his peace. *"His head was leaning on his hand, and his whole attitude was one of extreme depression. Indeed, so forlorn, and so much out of repair did he look, that little Virginia, whose first idea had been to run away and lock herself in her room, was filled with pity, and determined to try and comfort him. So light was her footfall, and so deep his melancholy, that he was not aware of her presence till she spoke to him."*[86]

This completely ruins the primal and essential nature of the ghost, as he is supposed to be the frightening creature everybody fears, yet instead of feeling fearful the young girl feels sorry for him. This only highlights the fact that in this story, the ghost is really just a mere parody, for not only are the adults not afraid of it, but not even the little girl is not afraid of it either. What more, the existence of the ghost begins and ends with terrifying people, yet he himself becomes the victim as the Otis's sons set a prank on him. All the pranks are humorous, with the most ironic being the fake ghost frightening the real one. Victimizing the ghost is the key element of mocking the Gothic genre. However, the more desperate and depressed the ghost becomes, the less comedic the story is. The genre evolves from a satirical and ironical story to a more serious and mysterious tale using fifteen-year-old Virginia to convey the message of the story.

This all happens after Virginia discovers a hidden room in which the weak, exhausted, and hopeless ghost resides. In that moment the motif of mystery arises within the story. Virginia agrees to help the ghost find his peace and move on by leaving the realm, which means that she must enter another dimension, which leads to her family being unable to find her. For the first time the whole Otis family is concerned and terrified. *"Good heavens! Child, where have you been?' said Mr Otis, ..., Cecil and I have been riding all over the country looking for you, and your mother has been*

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[86] Ibid, p.42

frightened to death.''[87] Although it was not his intention this time, he finally succeeded in what he had wanted for so long and what he had consider his purpose of life for centuries. Though he did it unwittingly, he managed to scare the Otis's family, after he had talked Virginia into leaving with him, causing the mysterious disappearance, which finally arose fear within the family members. The element of mystery and fear appears as not the slightest trace of Virginia had been discovered. The fear is eliminated the moment Virginia, pale and white with a casket in her hand, reappears, the mystery, however remains. She tells the relatives that she had been with the ghost and that he is now dead and had given her jewels before he died. She never told anyone what happened when she was with the ghost. *"Dear Cecil" I have no secrets from you." "Yes, you have," he answered, smiling, "you have never told me what happened to you when you were locked up with the ghost." "I have never told anyone, Cecil," said Virginia, gravely.* [88] The concept of mystery and mysterious events is an inseparable element of the gothic genre.

3.2.3   The Ghost's Redemption and Farewell

When little Virginia discovers that the ghost has been hiding in the Tapestry Chamber since his last appearance, she learns that the afterlife means unimaginable suffering for him. He hasn't slept or eaten in more than 300 years and is alone, which to Virginia seems unfair and she starts to feel empathy for the ghost. The possibility of dying and no longer being a ghost represents something beautiful to Sir Simon and is likened to a beautiful garden. *"Yes, Death. Death must be so beautiful. To lie in the soft brown earth, with the grasses waving above one's head, and listen to silence. To have no yesterday, and no tomorrow. To forget time, to forget life, to be at peace. You can open for me the portals of Death's house, for Love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is.''*[89]

However, to enter this garden, he needs a key, which in this case is a pure soul represented by Miss Virginia. According to an old prophecy: *"When a golden girl can win Prayer from out the lips of sin, When the barren almond bears, and a little child gives away it tears, Then shall all the house be still, And peace come to Canterville.''*[90]

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[87] Ibid, p. 55

[88] Ibid, p.65

[89] Ibid, p.46

[90] Ibid, p.47

The Angel of Death should have mercy on the ghost if the young girl is willing to weep for him and pray with him for his soul. However, this can only work because Virginia, unlike the rest of her family, is kind and pure. Her character is thus a means to redemption, and because she is moved by his story, she agrees to help him reach the desired garden, although it might endanger her.

The first verse clearly refers to Virginia as the golden girl, whose heart is innocent and therefore pure. The next passage talks about the part where Virginia must pray for the ghost and his sins, since he himself has no faith. The blossoming of the tree serves as a symbol of God's forgiveness: *"'Hallo!' suddenly exclaimed one of the twins, who had been looking out of the window… the old, withered almond-tree has blossomed. I can see the flowers quite plainly in the moonlight.' 'God has forgiven him,' said Virginia, gravely, as she rose to her feet, and a beautiful light seemed to illuminate her face."[91]* And the last verse refers not only to the peace that the Ghost himself will achieve, but also to those who inhabit the Chase, for they will no longer have to face any of his attempts to frighten them. Finally, the Ghost is freed of his torment and the story comes to its end.

3.3   The Comparative Analysis of Similar Elements

3.3.1   The Presence of Ghosts and their roles

The presence of ghosts is crucial to both stories, and both works take a different approach to it. While in Oscar Wilde's work the ghost is at the epicentre of the story, for Gaiman's work the ghosts play more of a supporting role for the protagonist.

In Wilde's story, the ghost represents a man who has not behaved nicely in his lifetime and is thus forced to haunt in ghost form as his punishment. And although haunting is his sole purpose in life, it is something he hates. Even more so when a pragmatic and fearless American family moves into his residence. The ghost is constantly ridiculed under the onslaught of constant jokes until he begins to wallow in grief and self-pity.

At the beginning he is described as a terrifying entity that haunts all who stand in his way, but this changes as the story progresses, and the ghost becomes an unhappy character with no purpose for his own existence. And since he has been successful in

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[91] Ibid, p.57

fulfilling his mission, which is to haunt, until now, he was unaware of the emptiness of his own soul which he only realises when all his attempts to scare the family failed. Thus, the ghost plays a role in the story more as a comic element that serves to entertain the reader.

In the case of *The Graveyard Book*, the ghosts play different roles. For example, the ghosts of Mr. and Mrs. Owens are the protagonist's surrogate parents, i.e., they take on a parental role. Other ghosts are Nobody's teachers or mentors, who educate him and help shape his character. But all the ghosts are friends and family to the protagonist, taking care of him, watching over him, and entertaining him with various stories from the times they themselves were still alive. All the ghosts of the graveyard try to make life as normal as possible for Nobody, however it is impossible, because the conditions in which the boy grows up are far from normal. Nevertheless, they are doing their best.

Unlike Wilde's story, this one doesn't make fun of the ghosts, or at least not on the level of *The Canterville Ghost*. In the case of *The Graveyard Book*, it's more about humorous fragments, or puns in the form of pestering the ghosts with various annoying questions. Another example of easing the atmosphere is when Mr and Mrs Owens encounter the ghost of Nobody's mother: "*There's a dear, said Mr Owens, when he saw a ghost, and his mouth dropped open, and he foun himself unable to think of anything to say. You might think – and if you did, you would be right – that Mr Owens should not have taken on so at seeing a ghost, given that Mr and Mrs Owens were themselves dead and had been for a few hundred years now, and given that the entirety of their social life, or very nearly, was spent with those who were also dead.*"[92]

3.3.2 Female Characters and Their Importance

In one of the cases, the girl's choices and actions lead to the resolution of the story, in the other the girl's character figures as a symbol of normal life. Although their purpose differs, they are both young girls who form the development of the stories.

In Wilde's story, Virginia is a young girl aged 15, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Otis and sister of Washington and twins Stars and Stripes. And it is this innocent young girl who brings the story to a happy ending. Through her character, Wilde illustrates several themes of the story, and her character is a key aspect of the entire work. Her

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[92] Ibid, p.9

qualities surpass those of her family in every way and she becomes the only friend for the ghost. Compared to the rest of her family, she is gentle and compassionate, while her parents and siblings are superficial and shallow. Despite young age she shows understanding and compassion towards the ghost, while others are cruel to him. She willingly listens to the ghosts when she finds him depressed and helps him redeem himself. Through her courage and compassion, she resolves to save the ghost. And it is her determination, compassion, and kindness that make her succeed in her task, showing the importance of these qualities.

In *The Graveyard Book*, Scarlett Perkins is a symbol of normal life, or rather the desire for it. This young girl, who accompanies Nobody on many of his graveyard adventures, is the only living friend of the protagonist. And because she is alive and lives beyond the gates of the cemetery, she ignites in Nobody a desire to live beyond them as well. Her friendship with Bod is based on mutual understanding, and although they disagree at times, the differences that divide them are also what bring them together and make their friendship so unique. Their friendship also serves as a reminder for Bod that he has a chance of living an ordinary life outside the graveyard. Through this motif, Gaiman explores the complexities of friendship shaped by the challenges of belonging to different words.

3.3.3 Two Visions on the Motif of Death

Both *The Canterville Ghost* and *The Graveyard Book* explore the Gothic theme of death, but from different perspectives. In "*The Canterville Ghost*," death is a punishment for the ghost, and redemption is necessary to find peace. In *The Graveyard Book,* death is a recurring theme that is explored through the protagonist's exposure to it and his growing acceptance of it. Both authors use the motif of death to create an eerie and haunting atmosphere, which is a common feature of Gothic literature.

In *The Canterville Ghost*, the motif of death is connected to the main character, as he is dead. He is a ghost who is forced to haunt Canterville Chase in his afterlife. And being a ghost is his punishment for acts committed while he was alive. Death, therefore, is not the end in this case, for in order to find peace, Sir Simon De Canterville must first redeem himself from his terrible past actions. And only when he is able to achieve redemption and throw off the burden of the past can he escape his punishment. When he succeeds, with Virginia's help at the end of the story, Wilde introduces the idea that everything is ephemeral, and everything will come to an end.

In *The Graveyard Book* the motif of death is also a significant and recurring theme and is therefore explored in various ways. The protagonist, Bod, is surrounded and exposed to death from the very beginning of the story, when his family is murdered, and he then lives among the ghosts he is raised by. The ghosts who raise Nobody also serve as a reminder of death, because they are all deceased. As the only living among the dead, Bod is continually reminded of his mortality. His adoptive mother, Mrs Owens, is very protective over him because she is afraid of all the potentially lethal dangers awaiting her son.

The motif of death is further explored through the character of Man Jack. Death always awaits and lurks Nobody as he is constantly chased by the vicious villain who murdered his family and craves to finish his task by killing the main protagonist as well. Jack's character ergo serves as a reminder that death is omnipresent and can come at any time. Bod's unique perspective, growing up among ghosts, makes him accept death and view it as something inevitably intertwined with life.

3.3.4 The Contribution of Setting to the Overall Atmosphere

The Gothic settings used by Wilde and Gaiman in their works significantly contribute to the overall atmosphere and tone of their narratives. The specific locations in which the stories are set play a fundamental role in saturating the works with Gothic motifs, creating an eerie and haunting environment that allows the use of supernatural elements and exploration of Gothic motifs and themes within the stories.

Wilde introduces the location of the story at its outset. The American family, the Otis family, purchases Canterville Chase from Lord Canterville, and Wilde establishes the haunted nature of the setting right immediately when he opens the novel with: *"When Mr. Hiram B. Otis, the American Minister, bought Canterville Chase, everyone told him he was doing a very foolish thing, as there was no doubt at all that the place was haunted."*[93] Furthermore, the introduction of the haunted location serves to establish the atmosphere and tone of the narrative, by creating a sense of unease. The haunted nature of the setting also allows to include supernatural elements, serving to indicate the suitability of the location for the Gothic genre.

Wilde further creates an eerie atmosphere in the passage where the family moves into their new residence*: "As they entered the avenue of Canterville Chase, however,*

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[93] Ibid, p.1

the sky became suddenly overcast with clouds, a curious stillness seemed to hold the atmosphere, a great flight of rooks passed silently over their heads, and, before they reached the house, some big drops of rain had fallen."[94] All of the elements Wilde uses in this passage further enhance the spooky nature of the entire setting. The residence in which the story takes place also contains a number of supernatural elements and unexplained events.

Gaiman sets the story of his novel in a graveyard, as the title of the book suggests. And it is in this graveyard that most of the story takes place. It is a mysterious place where a vast number of ghosts and other supernatural inhabitants reside. The setting is consequential as it becomes the haven for the protagonist where he is safe from the outside world. It includes various Gothic elements such as graves, coffins, an old funeral chapel, and underground spaces such as the resting place of the Master guarded by the Sleer. The graveyard serves both as a sanctuary and a symbol of belonging. This is evident when the toddler finds refuge behind the gates of the graveyard and is saved by its inhabitants. Silas, who is the only one of his kind in the graveyard and the whole book for that matter, expresses his longing for companionship and feeling of acceptance and belonging when he says: *"It must be good," said Silas, "to have somewhere that you belong. Somewhere that's home."*[95]

In conclusion, the Gothic settings of Canterville Chase and the graveyard play a crucial role in the overall atmosphere and tone of the works. Both settings are mysterious and eerie, and contain supernatural elements. Wilde's Canterville Chase establishes the haunted nature of the setting right at the beginning and uses various elements to create a spooky atmosphere. Gaiman uses a graveyard to emphasize the tone of the narrative and create a certain level of unease. Ultimately, the use of Gothic settings by both authors enhances themes of isolation, belonging, and the supernatural, which are all central to Gothic literature.

3.3.5 The Outsiders Who Belong Nowhere

The themes of belonging and estrangement occur in both *The Canterville Ghost* and *The Graveyard Book.* The themes of isolation, belonging and the distinctiveness of the individual is frequently explored feature of Gothic literature. Characters of such works

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[94] Ibid, p.7

[95] Ibid, p.22

are often described as feeling disconnected from the world around them which leads to the questions of identity, relationships, and self-awareness.

The motif of isolation and belonging is a prominent theme in *The Canterville Ghost* in association with the character of Sir Simon De Canterville. His character is depicted as a tragic figure, trapped in the form of a frightening ghost which creates a sort of disconnection from everything and everyone. And when his attempts to scare the Otis family are met with no success, it leads to him realizing the burden of his loneliness and despair. He is neither alive nor fully dead, he simply just exists on the threshold between life and death. The complexity of isolation and belonging is further explored with the resolution of his torment, as it also highlights the importance of belonging and relationships with the surrounding, because through the character of Virginia he can move on to the actual afterlife.

In *The Graveyard Book* the reader encounters the motif of loneliness and belonging several times. The characters of Nobody and Silas serve as examples for this part of the thesis. A living boy who grows up among ghosts will always suffer from a sense of separation, especially from the world to which he truly belongs. Although the ghosts and other inhabitants are family and friends to him, he will never be like them as long as he is alive. His desire to explore the world of the living where he could belong is central to the novel and is exemplified by his friendship with Scarlett, his only living friend. Although he eventually leaves the graveyard, he no longer desires to know about his past as he accepted himself as Nobody Owens the living boy among the dead and is therefore aware that he will never fully be able to be a part of the normal world.

Silas is another complex character and serves several purposes. He is a member of the graveyard and is very respected by all the other members of the graveyard. Silas serves as a mentor and provider for Nobody and also as his protector. The association of his character with the motif of belonging and separation comes in play when Silas is revealed to be the only person with the ability to leave the graveyard as he is not dead nor alive. This ambiguity of his nature makes him the only one of his kind which creates a space for the motif of estrangement and distinction.

In conclusion, the motifs of isolation and belonging are recurring themes in Gothic literature and are explored in both *The Canterville Ghost* and *The Graveyard Book*. The characters of Sir Simon De Canterville, Nobody Owens, and Silas all experience different forms of disconnection from the world around them. Through the resolution of their respective difficulties, the importance of belonging is emphasized, as seen in

Sir Simon's ability to move on to the afterlife with the help of Virginia, Nobody's acceptance of his identity as a living boy among the dead, and Silas's ability to provide for Bod due to his unique ability to leave the graveyard.

4   Conclusion

In the theoretical part of my bachelor thesis, I focused on providing an introduction of the Gothic genre, its various forms in children's literature and important motifs and themes. By doing so, I prepared a foundation for a further analysis of these motifs in the individual chapters of the practical part of my thesis. My focus was comparing the similarities and differences of the most prominent Gothic elements of *The Graveyard Book* and *The Canterville Ghost*.

In the practical part I have focused on the analysis of the literary works *The Canterville Ghost* by Oscar Wilde and *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman. I commenced the practical part by introducing both authors and providing information about their literary background. One of the primary goals of the practical part was to delineate several key Gothic elements that were described in the theoretical part and analyse them in the context of both works. These included elements such as the supernatural characters, the eerie settings, or the theme of belonging. Furthermore, I focused on the analysis of the characters from each work and tried to examine their characteristics and importance in both stories. In the case of *The Graveyard Book*, I have concentrated on scrutinising the supernatural characters and elements that are fundamental to the story. In the case of *The Canterville Ghost*, I have attempted to explain the significance of the humour of the work and reflect it on the main character.

To conclude, despite being written in different periods, the comparative analysis revealed that the works include similar or even identical Gothic elements. While both authors explore these Gothic features from different perspectives and with distinct methods, structurally and in terms of content, both works contain elements characteristic of Gothic novels. Hence, it is evident, that despite undergoing significant changes over time, the legacy of the traditional Gothic works is to some extent still carried over into contemporary Gothic literature.

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