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Gothic spaces in Candia McWilliam's novel *A Little Stranger*

(Bakalářská práce)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

V Olomouci dne.....

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Annotation/Anotace

In my thesis, I am analysing Candia McWilliam's novel *Little Stranger* from the viewpoint of modern approaches to Gothic fiction. To root this particular novel within the Gothic tradition, I outline the basic elements of traditional Gothic fiction focusing on the female Gothic writers.

I aim to receive an image of modern Gothic in women's writing, its transformation and adaptation from the tradition to current topics and its possible usage as literature of women's protest.

Ve své bakalářské práci analyzuji román od Candie McWilliamové *Little Stranger* z pohledu moderního přístupu ke gotické fikci. Abych tento román zasadila do gotické tradice, nastíňuji základní prvky tradiční gotické literatury, přičemž se zaměřím na ženské autorky gotické literatury.

Usiluji o získání obrázku o moderní gotice v literatuře ženských autorek, o proměně a adaptaci gotiky z tradičních na současná témata a o možném použití gotiky jako ženské literatury protestu.

I. Introduction and aims

The aim of my thesis, is to look at Candia McWilliam's novel *A Little Stranger* from the point of view of the modern Gothic. I will try to determine if we can categorise this novel as a Female Gothic, or whether we can place it amongst the Gothic tradition at all.

In doing so, I am going to consult literary theory dealing with Gothic's definition – the traditional and the modern as well. As I would like to demonstrate, the whole idea of Gothic is a very broad subject that is up for discussion. As Hogle argues, Gothic fiction is hardly "Gothic" at all.¹ And even more so, as Baldick puts it, the literary Gothic really is anti-Gothic.² Specification of a "female" Gothic as has been the focus of some in the past two decades, is a further complication of an already tangled web. The question is, whether we should even try to make a distinctive category for female literature at all. On one hand a sign of emancipation of women, or possibly a step back on the other. Not only is it problematic to seclude women's tradition of writing from the men's – women's literary tradition develops on the basis of men's writings – but it will most likely be dismissed later as inconvenient. With the separation we build another gap between men and women, where a joining of both would be in place.³ The only option plausible to me, seems not to rewrite the anthologies, but gradually include modern women writers as not to political correctness or positive discrimination, but according to their qualities, which are again difficult to determine.⁴

There is, however, unarguably a certain specific approach of women to the Gothic, and in saying so I am including the approach of

¹ Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., "Introduction", *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1.

² Chris Baldick, *The Oxford book of Gothic tales* (Oxford University Press, 1993) xiii.

³ Some feministic theories talk about *écriture féminine*, a project of women's writing that would differ from the form women used until now. See Herta Nagl-Docekal, *Feministická filozofie: Výsledky, problémy, perspektivy* (SLON: Praha, 2007) 58 – 73.

⁴ More on this topic see Morrisová, Pam. "Zpochybnění kánonu a literárních institucí" in *Literatura a feminismus* (Brno: Host, 2000)

the women critics as well. Gothic has been a domain of literature, where women contributed from the very start, concurrently with men.

The secondary literature that I am using is a compromise between its relevance and accessibility.

II. In the search of the Gothic

1. Troubles of defining: the more you limit, the more it grows

Gothic as a term seems to be very elusive and avoiding its definition, which some ascribe to its very character. In this section, I would like to outline some of the views on the Gothic, contrasting the "old" and the "new", to lead me up to the modern view upon Gothicity which contains my main concern: the Female Gothic. I take for support Suzanne Rintoul as she writes: "How can someone add the existing Gothic criticism without first going back and dealing with the problem of defining it and redefining it?"⁵

The problem of defining what Gothic in literature, starts with the definition of the word Gothic itself and its connotations. The first meaning connected to this unfortunate term, is architecture. Baldick accurately talks about "incompatibility" because, inconveniently, architectural Gothic denotes something that "flourished from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century", whereas the literary (and later film) Gothic concerns itself with the "works that appeared in an entirely different medium several hundreds of years later".⁶ To add to the general confusion, in a postmodern sense, we can talk about "architectural Gothic", where we find connections and parallels between what is being portrayed in the story and architectural features. To complicate the things even more – a typical setting of a traditional Gothic story takes place in a castle, ruin, or an old mansion – castles being a typical product of Gothic architecture. Let me take a quick look on the beginnings of the Gothic.

⁵ Rintoul, Suzanne, "Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. Vol. 17: Iss. 4, Article 7. July 2005. 10 July 2011. 703.

Available at <<http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss4/7>>

⁶ Baldick, xi.

2. The old Gothic

In trying to understand the application of the term "Gothic", I briefly turn to the approach used by many: considering the etymology of the word to fully understand the development of its meaning.

The 1910th *Etymological dictionary of the English language* defines the word Gothic as a derivative of the word Goth meaning "one of a certain early Germanic tribe".⁷ *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* from 1995 expands on this original definition when Gothic is "pertaining to the Goths", but in "obsolete" usages also "Germanic, Teutonic; medieval, romantic, of the Dark Ages; barbarous (and) savage."⁸ Other meanings are of no relevance to the literary Gothic. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* offers, apart from the traditional definition of Goth, one more extra: "an uncivilized or ignorant person".⁹ With a lower case first letter as in "goth", the meanings are as follows: "a style of rock music derived from punk, often with apocalyptic or mystical lyrics; a member of a subculture favouring black clothing, white and black make-up, metal jewellery, and goth music". Under Gothic as an adjective, we find "of the Goths or of their language; in the style prevalent in Western Europe in the 12th-16th century, characterized by pointed arches; (of a novel etc.) in a style popular in the 18th-19th century, with supernatural or horrifying events; barbarous, uncouth; (...)old-fashioned German, black letter, or sans serif".

As can be see from these entries, the idea and the meaning of the Gothic developed throughout the centuries significantly. As Baldick points out using binary oppositions, the Gothic came to be used in contrast to Graeco-Roman, and in Renaissance became

⁷ Walter W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) 246.

⁸ C. T. Onions, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 407.

⁹ Della Thompson, ed., *The Concise Oxford Cictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 587.

symbolically connected with the medieval, Dark Ages, barbarity and superstition:

"(...) Although the Goths themselves never constructed a single Gothic cathedral, nor composed any Gothic fiction, these later senses of Gothic still have a recognizable meaning by virtue of their polar opposition to the 'Classical' architectural and literary traditions derived from Greece and Rome."¹⁰

Through a shift, the qualities ascribed to the Gothic tribes, that is, their heathenishness, cruelty and savagery, became connotations of the word itself.

Neo-Gothic revivalism in architecture, that started with the onset of the eighteenth century is then divided on this matter. For some revivalists, the architectural Gothic emphasised the Christian of the medieval periods, while for some it "suggested creativity and freedom of expression and was set in contrast to the soulless mechanical reproductions of the Victorian age."¹¹ The latter group adopted the assumption of Gothic's savagery and became parallel to the development of the new literature, that was to be called Gothic, even though it was the eighteenth century.

Another designation for the new literature, that looked back at the medieval period through a blurred lense, would have probably been less confusing for us today. The founding father of Gothic, Horace Walpole, however, used the term "Gothic" as a subtitle to his novel *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* in 1764. Clery claims that "Gothic novel" is in fact "mostly a twentieth-century coinage", and that Walpole adopted it in the title to "annoy the stuffy critics who objected to the experiment" and because of the concurrence with Neo-Gothic.¹² Horace himself was an architect and decided to build himself his own "castle" comparable to the settings of his novels at

¹⁰ Baldick, xii.

¹¹ David Punter and Glennis Byron, "Art and Architecture," *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004) 33.

¹² E. J. Clery, "The genesis of 'Gothic' fiction", *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 21.

Strawberry Hill, becoming thus a founder and a forerunner of Gothic Revivalism/Neo-Gothic in architecture.¹³

The eclectic part of Gothic revivalism, became precisely one of the distinctive features of the Gothic novel, that did not care for preciseness, as Hennessy summarises:

Gothic architecture, though in a vague rather than a realistic way, was part of most novelists' settings – in the form of a half-ruined castle or abbey – and was used to create 'Gothic gloom' and sublimity (...).¹⁴

For the emphasis on the barbarosity, Baldick suggests that the view of literary Gothic becomes virtually "anti-Gothic".¹⁵ He claims, that although the writers cherish the "imaginative freedoms and symbolic possibilities of (...) folk beliefs", they never seem to cherish the Gothic itself.¹⁶ Indeed, the folk tradition with its supernatural and morals is one of the building blocks of Gothic.

There is a set list of distinct features that apply to the traditional Gothic story. How Punter defines it: a "group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s" that shares some common characteristics.¹⁷ But what is it, that makes a story distinctively Gothic? Punter claims that the story is usually "portraying the terrifying", using "archaic settings, (...)the supernatural, (...) highly stereotyped characters", but it is also trying to "deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense".¹⁸ Hogle comments that the "gothic tale usually takes place (...) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space", while the haunting comes in forms of "ghosts, spectres, or monsters", which have in common their origin in the hidden past.¹⁹ Baldick sees as our attraction to Gothic's poetic as well through "common repertoire of shared fears" that are intrinsic to it and

¹³ E. H. Gombrich, *Příběh Umění*, trans. Miroslava Tůmová (Praha: Mladá Fronta a Argo, 2003) 476-477.

¹⁴ Brendan Hennessy, *The Gothic Novel* (Longman Group Ltd.: 1978) 8.

¹⁵ Baldick, xiii.

¹⁶ Baldick, xiii.

¹⁷ Punter, 1.

¹⁸ Punter, 1.

¹⁹ Hogle, 2.

summoned "only within its own peculiar framework of conventions."

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The most comprehensive and evocative list I've seen so far, is that which Allan Lloyd-Smith gives us (as quoted by Armitt):

extreme situations, darkness, threat, paranoia; exaggerated villains and innocent victims; subterfuge and plots; ancient houses, castles, monasteries, dungeons, crypts and passages, wild scenery, craggy mountains or winding maze-like tracts; stage machinery, hidden trapdoors, secret passageways; speaking portraits, ghosts, doubles, and other supernatural-seeming beings; monstrous and grotesque creatures; pain, terror, horror and sadism.²¹

Lastly, the Gothic was approached from the theoretical point of view as well. In support of the genre talks Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was influential as it brought to the world the idea of the "sublime". According to him, the terrible "sublime" works the muscles of imagination and that provides the wanted relief.²² The sublime, then, is something capable of producing pain or danger.²³ In his 1757's work, Burke talks against the "steady diet of the familiar" and he sees "imaginative transport as desirable".²⁴

The second treatise then being Ann Radcliffe's "On the Supernatural in Poetry", where she distinguishes between "terror" and "horror". The terror, according to her, "holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense" and effectively produces the feelings of sublime, the horror "confronts the principal characters with the gross violence (...)" and the reader is virtually paralyzed. This distinction becomes very important in the later differentiation between the female and male approach to the Gothic.²⁵

3. The Modern Gothic

²⁰ Baldick, xxii.

²¹ Lucie Armitt, *Twentieth-century gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011) 2.

²² Hogle, 28.

²³ Hogle, 14.

²⁴ Hogle, 28.

²⁵ Hogle, 3.

To many, "modern Gothic" as a phrase seems contradictory. The modern Gothic, despite being widespread and popular, is often not recognised and labelled as Gothic. Armitt admits that in the opposition to a more definable traditional Gothic:

twentieth-century reignition of interest in the contemporary Gothic has us reeling in terms of how best to tame this amorphous and ever-expanding 'monster'.²⁶

Baldick comments, that the modern Gothic "has adapted the archaic atmosphere of early Gothic fiction, with its usual time of action in the late Middle Ages or the early modern period, to later periods, even in some cases to the writer's own time." Importantly, this was achieved by "abstracting certain leading features of these original Gothic settings, retaining especially the enclosed spaces of the old building, with further associations of the past's destructive cruelty." Baldick further argues that the time setting can be more flexible if "the tale focuses upon a relatively enclosed space in which some antiquated barbaric code still prevails".²⁷

This suggests a very open space for the genre. The one and only prerogative, as also Baldick suggests, is that even if "the category of the Gothic tale overlaps at some points with its neighbouring fictional types" it has to keep "special features of its own".²⁸ These, importantly, exist aside the other separate fictional types. We, then, can gothicise a chosen genre by applying Gothic features to it. By this characterisation, the boundaries of modern Gothic are becoming rather unstable, which is at the same time its typical feature: if there were trademark villains, castles, haunted heroines, ghouls and vampires in the old Gothic, the new Gothic transforms itself beyond recognition and has to be *sought*. This inevitably raises the question when approaching any of the modern works: is it still Gothic?

Many argue, that it is, indeed, not. Jones parades some modern examples of the Gothic such as various as Freud's case studies, the

²⁶ Armitt, 2.

²⁷ Baldick, xv.

²⁸ Baldick, xi.

Oprah Winfrey show or the Vietnam war.²⁹ In her radical essay, Alexandra Warwick, disses the approach of modern Gothic studies.

The Gothic is everywhere, out in the light and at the centre of things, which already might be thought strange, given that it is usually characterised as being, in the most general terms, at the dark margin of culture. (...) What do I want to do is ask why, (...) no one has come to announce the death of Gothic.³⁰

Her essay suggests, that the modern Gothic is in an identity crisis. She refuses the Gothic as a genre saying it is a "mode" with a "loose tradition" and its "defining characteristics are its mobility and continued capacity for reinvention."³¹ What she perceives as a huge problem, is criticism that merely mechanically looks for the features of Gothic only to find it, as she poignantly exclaims: "here is an example of the uncanny, therefore an example of Gothic."³² She goes on to accuse the critics of production of Gothic reading instead of an analysis of the text, feeling that they are "concerned with describing the instances and situations of every possible uncanny moment and haunting" too much.³³ As also Armitt remarks: "Gothic (...) has become means of reading culture, not just a cultural phenomenon to read."³⁴ Warwick poses a very serious allegation on the matter of confusion between the meaning and text:

"Gothic is then simultaneously that which haunts and that which is haunted. (...) It is not surprising from this then that everything becomes possibly identifiable as Gothic, because what is there that is not meaning, or text, criticism or literature?"³⁵

This approach makes the Gothic devoid of sense, the field of Gothic becomes "so large as to be meaningless."³⁶ What she suggests is that our society is obsessed with trauma. In contrast to the old

²⁹ Timothy G. Jones, "The Canniness of the Gothic: Genre as Practice," *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 124-133. P.124. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Web. 5 Aug. 2011. p. 127

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=43568500&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>

³⁰ Alexandra Warwick. "Feeling Gothicky?" *Gothic Studies* 9.1 (2009): 5. 5 July 2011 <
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7551/is_200705/ai_n32225220/>

³¹ Warwick, 6.

³² Warwick, 6.

³³ Warwick, 7.

³⁴ Armitt, 10.

³⁵ Warwick, 8.

³⁶ Warwick, 8.

Gothic texts, we seem to indulge ourselves in our haunting secrets and we reveal them. If the old Gothic was concerned with "threat and loss and the impossibility of coming to terms with them", it seems now, that "prohibition itself is lost (...) and contemporary Gothic is the manifestation of the desire *for* trauma, (...) trauma itself is the lost object."³⁷ If once Gothic fulfilled the function of an outlet for suppressed anxieties and fear of fragmentation, now we believe, that we have to have a problem, an imperfection to be complete and to talk about it, publicly, as much as possible.³⁸

The concept of trauma is very close to that of Bruhm. He even calls the Gothic a "narrative of trauma", and believes it is its product and enactment.³⁹ However, according to him, we deal with a lost object, "the lost object being the self."⁴⁰

In such open atmosphere, the Gothic loses its functionality, as we really could regard anything as Gothic. I would argue, that one of the main problems of contemporary Gothic, is the psychoanalysis. Since the publication of Sigmund Freud's essay on the "Uncanny" in 1919, some critics have been literally obsessed with this concept, identifying anything and everything as "soo uncanny" and through the oedipal complex. The basic idea of the "uncanny" is the familiar that reappears in an unfamiliar way.⁴¹ The approach is rather problematic because it tends to misuse the openness of Gothic (or any other literary category) and results in research that is very questionable and vague.

The psychoanalysis, however, is like a disease that has spread to the most unpredictable corners of our lives, and literature is affected not only by its concept of the uncanny. Ed Cameron devotes a whole book on the psychopathology of Gothic, but admits right at the start

³⁷ Warwick, 11.

³⁸ Warwick, 12.

³⁹ Steven Bruhm, "Contemporary Gothic: why we need it," *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.) 259 – 276. 268.

⁴⁰ Bruhm, 269.

⁴¹ Hogle, 6.

that he is not an expert on psychoanalysis and the whole aim is problematic, as: "Gothic fiction is text, not subject."⁴² Critics tend to forget that despite the realness of the characters, they are still fictional and we cannot treat them as patients unconditionally. As Rintoul puts it, some "conflate Gothic narratives with the approaches that have been taken to read them."⁴³ On the other hand, Williams supports the usage of psychoanalysis, saying it is useful because the "texts are so close to fantasy" and the Freudian concepts have already blended in with our society. She also warns against the confusion of fictional with reality, however, against "the assumption that narratives reflect material reality in a fairly straightforward way."⁴⁴

More to the point, in relation to vampires Jones writes that it is all really nice to "suggest various psychoanalytic constructs in relation to biting and sucking", but what matters to the reader is that "mouths are a fact of the face, and fangs save the undead from having to use a straw".⁴⁵

Leaving the problem of psychoanalysis behind, Jones comes to rescue the modern Gothic reminding us that the old Gothic is now "another subcategory" of the Gothic as an umbrella term.⁴⁶ Our confusion lies then simply in the fact that Gothic as a "superordinate category (...) has been emptied of texts".⁴⁷ He believes, that we "simply have not been able to articulate what the Gothic is *not*."⁴⁸ His original theory of "Gothic habitus" describes Gothic as something "which is *done* rather than something that simply *is*".⁴⁹ The theory is disputable, as it leaves the interpretation much to the reader, but if the

⁴² Ed Cameron, "Introduction," *The Psychopathology of the Gothic Romance: Perversion, Neuroses and Psychosis in Early Works of the Genre* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers: 2010) 1.

⁴³ Rintoul, 702.

Available at <<http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol17/iss4/7>>

⁴⁴ Anne Williams, "The Female Plot of Gothic Fiction," *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). 135-140. 136-137.

⁴⁵ Jones, 130.

⁴⁶ Jones, 125.

⁴⁷ Jones, *ibid*.

⁴⁸ Jones, *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Jones, 126-127.

Gothic is not recognised by most of the public and used mainly by the critics, do we still need it as a designation?

In contrast to that, Joanna Russ as early as 1973 simply described the "descendants" of "the works of Monk Lewis or Mrs. Radcliffe" as "Horror Stories".⁵⁰ As I see it, a clever move on her part.

As I have undermined the modern Gothic as much as possible, I will now briefly try to point out some of the efforts to define it. The modern Gothic transforms the usual spaces of the old Gothic, so the story can take place in an "urban underworld, a decaying storehouse, factory, laboratory, public building, or some new recreation of an older venue, such as (...) an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory".⁵¹ Armitt emphasises Gothic's relation to architecture: "Gothic's disciplinary home in architecture enables a very close relationship between space and the fabric of buildings in twentieth-century texts."⁵² The haunting, then, does not have to appear in a supernatural form anymore, though it is still connected somehow to the past, there is something that haunts the characters let it be "psychologically, physically, or otherwise".⁵³ I would argue, however, that while each and everyone of us was not born at this precise moment, there is always *something* in the past. Armitt comments on the loss of supernaturality claiming that

contemporary Gothic does explore a paradox: though we may long to be haunted (...), we can no longer believe in ghosts. We respond by transforming them into metaphors (...)⁵⁴

The lists of typical concerns of modern Gothic as suggested by Bruhm are such: "the dynamics of the family, the limits of rationality and passion, the definition of statehood and citizenship, the cultural

⁵⁰ Joanna Russ, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6:4 1973: Spring: 666-691. P. 666.

⁵¹ Hogle, 2.

⁵² Armitt, 4.

⁵³ Hogle, 2.

⁵⁴ Armitt, 166.

effects of technology."⁵⁵ What is significant for the Female Gothic, is the inclusion of feminism, gay liberation and African-American Civil rights among the "current anxieties".⁵⁶ As Brabon and Genz argue, "Gothic is a sensitive cultural barometer that 'is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the realities of our current historical moment'".⁵⁷

To sum up, Rintoul comes to believe, that "studying the Gothic has no best approach" and the "criticism of the genre has reached a point where no one approach supersedes another".⁵⁸ Eventually, the final verdict it is up to the reader, editor or the author himself.

I believe, that the Gothic is a slippery fish, the disgust of wetness included, the moment you hold it, you are almost certain of the species. Ultimately, what is the main concern is the edibility and the fact that it was a fish after all. I believe that the Gothic studies are still about to suffer of uncertainty what to include as there is no halt to the tide. I will have to, eventually, agree with Jones as he points out:

Explaining how a text (...) is Gothic, is much like trying to explain the punchline of a joke, (...) it can be done, but the joke loses something in the explanation. (...) If we did not pick that a text was Gothic, it might be that, for us, it is not.⁵⁹

4. The Female Gothic

With such an ambitious heading, I would like to specify that my main aim in this chapter will not be a summary of all the female authors in the Gothic field, nor of those that are considered major. What I find much more intriguing is the discussion of the Female

⁵⁵ Bruhm, 259.

⁵⁶ Bruhm, 260.

⁵⁷ Brabon, Benjamin, and Stéphanie Genz. "Introduction: Postfeminist Gothic." *Gothic Studies* 9.2 (2007): 1-6. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=4&hid=15&sid=acbe62ea-cdb5-4e6b-ba74-e3cae099d9e1%40sessionmgr14&bdata=Jmxhbm9Y3Mmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#db=a9h&AN=27638701>

⁵⁸ Rintoul, 709.

⁵⁹ Timothy G. Jones, "The Canniness of the Gothic: Genre as Practice," *Gothic Studies* 11.1 (2009): 124-133. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 5 Aug. 2011. p. 127

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=43568500&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>

Gothic (*note: later in the text shortened as FG*) as a category and an issue as such.

It is a fact that after Horace Walpole, the women's reaction to the newly established genre was fairly quick, and as soon as 1773 Anna Laetitia Aikin publishes a Gothic fragment with her brother, and an essay on terror.⁶⁰ The first notable work of a female author follows shortly after: in four years Clara Reeve's *The Champion of Virtue* is published.⁶¹ Since then, the women writers have been a firm part of the Gothic tradition. From Anne Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, to Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Shirley Jackson, Angela Carter and Toni Morrison.

Do they, however, exhibit a part of the tradition that should be treated separately from the male authors of Gothic as a so called "Female Gothic"? There has been a continuous and growing debate on this topic since the late 70s. The beginning of the debate is marked by the year 1976, when *Literary Women* was published. Here, Ellen Moers introduced the phrase "Female Gothic" for the first time. She defines it rather broadly as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic."⁶²

From today's point of view, this definition seems unsatisfactory and insufficient to the faddy literary theorists. What about the women as protagonists, present also in the Gothic of male writers, do we count them out? What is more, the feminists call, we should not only consider the female side, but the portrayal of men as well, while these "inevitably either marry those women or try to kill them, or possibly both".⁶³ And as Fitzgerald observes, does text have a

⁶⁰ Hogle, Jerrold E., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fictions*. Pages xvii-xviii.

⁶¹ Hogle, xvii-xviii.

⁶² Moers, Ellen. "Female Gothic." In *Literary Women: The Great Writers*. New York: Doubleday, 1976. Pages 90-98. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. <http://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/knarf/Articles/moers.html>

⁶³ Ruotolo, Christine, et al., *The Female Gothic: An Introduction in The Gothic: Materials for Study*. 25 July 2011. Accessed at <<http://graduate.engl.virginia.edu/enec981/Group/ami.intro.html>>

gender?⁶⁴ Moers admits to struggle with the definition herself, as she only states that Gothic has to do with "fear".⁶⁵ However, Moers definition became the most influential and set a starting point for the FG criticism that followed

Moers also emphasises the co-funding qualities women in Gothic, especially writer Ann Radcliffe, as she says: "Ann Radcliffe firmly set the Gothic in one of the ways it would go ever after: a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine."⁶⁶ Or at least, as Fitzgerald states, she inspires later feminist readings to claim that "if any single author could be said to 'own' the Gothic, (...), it is Radcliffe."⁶⁷ It has to be said, that the criticism of the female Gothic developed alongside with feminist theories and this is also its main flavour.

The contribution of women to the Gothic, is then, undisputable. In what aspects is the female Gothic different from the male tradition? As Kramer states: "Female Gothic novels are typically about women who are imperiled in some way, with the addition that the female protagonist is often trapped by either circumstances or a mouldering castle, or both."⁶⁸ Baldick talks about the "Radcliffean model of the heroine enclosed in the master's house".⁶⁹ The plot is, what we could describe as romantic and adventurous. Traditionally, this connection is correct, as the traditional Gothic novels were also regarded as romances, and women of the eighteenth century were "strikingly successful as authors of romances, especially [the] Gothic [ones]."⁷⁰ Williams talks of her concept of the "nightmère", that came

⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, Lauren. "Female Gothic and the Institutionalization of Gothic Studies." *Gothic Studies* 6.1 (2004): 8-18. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=14860832&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>

⁶⁵ Moers, 90.

⁶⁶ Moers, 90.

⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, 12.

⁶⁸ Kyra Kramer, "Raising Veils and other Bold Acts: The Heroine's Agency in Female Gothic Novels," *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, Volume 1, Issue 2. (2010-2011) 15 July 2011. Accessed at

<http://www.zittaw.com/starticle2kramer.htm>

⁶⁹ Baldick, xxi.

⁷⁰ Williams, 135.

into being when at that time this "other" gendered "female" became newly visible, powerful, and fascinating."⁷¹

The plot is plainly described by Kramer as that of a "heterosexual romance", where the heroin is "usually rewarded by companionate marriage, a union that is figured as both practical and emotionally fulfilling."⁷² The only way to achieve happiness is through marriage. Still, it is considered a "triumph of the threatened woman, who gains control."⁷³

Although the "Radcliffean Gothic does not in any simple way reject conventional gender roles", as Heller writes, the uncertainty of the role of the woman is present as the movement for women's right was already gaining momentum.⁷⁴ Through the feminist lense, which is the prevalent optics for the female Gothic, it is seen traditionally as a vehicle for women's fight against male oppression. As Kramer argues:

Emily's agency in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* demonstrates that from the beginning the Female Gothic novel has been the "site of ideological conflict, a vehicle through which at once to criticize domesticity and to pose its values as a barrier against rebellion and social change (...)the Female Gothic quickly evolved into "a coded system whereby female authors covertly communicated to other women ... their ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominate ... ideologies of their culture"⁷⁵

Whereas primary, the heroin was mostly passive, in the modern Gothic "her agency has increased dramatically due to feminist changes in the socio-cultural framework", the heroin is "active and rational instead of passive and controlled by their emotions."⁷⁶

⁷¹ Anne Williams, "Nightmère's Milk," *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). 99-107. 99.

⁷² Kramer, *ibid.*

⁷³ Kramer, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Tamar Heller, "Reigns of Terror", *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992) 13-37. 14-15.

⁷⁵ Kramer, *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Kramer, *ibid.*

The main concern for the female Gothic is the area that has been allotted to woman through tradition. Heller remarks that the female Gothic tries to "thematize women's sense of isolation and imprisonment within a domestic ideology."⁷⁷ As Baldick comments, "domestic interior" is the "most imprisoning space of all", while the house is "that of patriarchy".⁷⁸ Heller further argues, that the text should be regarded as "political", and can therefore be able to suit as a "vehicle for social protest."⁷⁹ Williams holds the opinion, that to deem it only so is insufficient. According to her, the Female Gothic is "revolutionary," further, she claims, that it is not only a protest, but a rewriting of the patriarchal, an "alternative".⁸⁰ As she remarks, we should reconsider our view and not take passivity as a negative feature only, writing that "our culture is assuming that independence and conquest are the supreme signs of accomplishment."⁸¹ The issue, according to her, lies in the view on men that were seen as "normative", through Gothic, we can observe the effect on both the male and the female part, as these subjects "necessarily have a different experience".⁸²

Fully in compliance with the feminist viewpoint, seems to be Angie Pazhavila, who in her essay "The Female Gothic Subtext" compares Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" saying that "Female Gothic is a horror genre comprised of texts written by women authors about a female protagonist". She holds the opinion that even if the original purpose of Gothic literature might have been a shared experience of danger and fear with the protagonist, "many women authors utilized [the]Gothic conventions to conceal a radical subtext critiquing the gender politics of their age." Pazhavila sees the reason of such a conduct in the situation of women that needed to find a "safe medium

⁷⁷ Heller, 14.

⁷⁸ Baldick, xxii.

⁷⁹ Heller, 16-17.

⁸⁰ Williams, 138.

⁸¹ Williams, 139.

⁸² Williams, 100.

in which to address the universality of female suffering, as well as introduce progressive notions for the modification of female conduct". Jane Eyre is for her a "human rights and an equal rights advocate" that was created to support underprivileged women and for their education that something as female autonomy was possible. Pazhavila perceives the final marriage not as Jane's surrender to traditional limitations, but finds that it takes place "on her own terms". She further uses "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a contrasting material to show what would happen if the woman succumbed to the male oppressor and concludes that "[it] poignantly teaches women that though they may feel isolated and abnormal, their experience is not singular".⁸³

In recent years, the criticism of the FG is taking a different direction and we have come to what seems a reevaluation, as Fitzgerald does in her contribution "Female Gothic and the Institutionalization of Gothic Studies" that I've already cited from earlier.

Fitzgerald asks if "Female Gothic [has] anything left to offer?"⁸⁴ What she believes is that this "category (...) have outlived its usefulness".⁸⁵ The time has come to realise what this category has brought to us and to the Gothic studies. As a "result of the rise of feminism and feminist literary criticism in the US during the late 1960s and 1970s" it fulfilled its function perfectly in its support for "uncovering the lost tradition of women's literature" which was on the feminists' agenda of that time.⁸⁶ Despite admitting that the FG might have "rescued Gothic studies" in that it significantly came to help in the defense of its importance, as a category it had to face similar problems as the 90s feminism, which I believe, are yet to be solved: an example of that is the question of gender influence on one's work mentioned above, or the general question if there are any

⁸³ Pazhavila, Angie. "The Female Gothic Subtext: Gender Politics in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper." *Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal*. 2007. Volume 1 Number 2. <http://www.lurj.org/article.php/vol1n2/gothic.xml>

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, pg. 8.

⁸⁵ Fitzgerald, pg. 8.

⁸⁶ Fitzgerald, 8 – 9.

characteristics that are intrinsically male or female – we lack an adequate answer.⁸⁷

She holds the opinion that in a way, women fought for the Gothic territory with male writers as she illustrates with the debate between Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe.⁸⁸ She comes to a wicked conclusion, in the end. According to her, Moers and other female critics that participate in the FG are writing in the Gothic mode and simply become a part of the Gothic tradition itself. Connecting Moers to Radcliffe, she says: "Neither is quite the 'originator' of Female Gothic, as tradition or critical category, as was once believed, but their importance as 'pioneers' in both is indisputable."⁸⁹ This, I am tempted to say rather a Gothic twist, an essence of its circularity, does not hinder her from her principal point that "by the late 1990s, (...) Female Gothic was something to rid ourselves of."⁹⁰

Smith and Wallace see the discussion of gender as a cause to the contemplation "whether the Female Gothic constitutes a separate literary genre" at all. They reevaluate the FG and list possible other names for this category: "'women's Gothic', 'feminine Gothic', 'lesbian Gothic', even 'Gothic feminism'". They assure us of the fact that "any simple correlation of plot with the author's gender, (...) had already been broken down". When it comes to the suggested new names for this phenomenon, the most plausible to me of all proposed variants, seems to be the Feminine Gothic. The Feminine Gothic is what they claim to be "influenced by poststructuralist scepticism about essentialist gender categories" and it is used to signal (...) focus on the gender of the speaking subject in the text rather than the gender of the author". On the other hand, gothic feminism is used when Gothic heroines are "blameless victims of a corrupt and oppressive patriarchal society" and they are "utilising passive-aggressive and masochistic

⁸⁷ Fitzgerald, 9. For further information on gender specific issues see Renzetti, Claire M. and Curran, Daniel J. *Women, men, and society, 5th edition*. Allyn and Bacon, 2003.

⁸⁸ Fitzgerald, 12-13.

⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, 14.

⁹⁰ Fitzgerald, 14.

strategies to triumph over that system", which we could use for the older tradition in Gothic as well.⁹¹

The general idea, then, is that of reevaluation and rereading. As simple as it is, it is necessary for the Gothic, because it always functions as a feature intertwined in many genres and defined by the current situation in the society.

Probably the newest suggestion of approach towards the FG is the Postfeminist Gothic. Combining two rather vague designations grouped is a bold idea. The main concern here is, again, with the definition, without a certain limitation, the unit cannot hold. Brabon and Genz say that Postfeminist Gothic "addresses the impasse that critics have encountered when discussing the Female Gothic's tendencies 'to psychologically universalise the female mind or to oversimplify the cultural function of Gothic writing'." They believe that "postfeminism offers a productive framework to conceptualise contemporary Gothic expressions that exceed the logic of non-contradiction and demand fresh perspectives and modes of understanding." As good as it sounds, I remain sceptical, for the interpretation appears to be more than broad and indeed, the broadness might be the binding element: "transgressive and boundary-defying capabilities, (...) eschewal of a binary logic and (...)embrace of pluralism."⁹²

An important part of the contemporary Female Gothic are what Williams calls "mass-market Gothics": an outburst of modern Gothic novels written by women that came in the 60s.⁹³ Williams asserts "a rigidly formulaic plot" of these stories:

The text told the heroine's story from her own point of view. Alone in the world and poor, she usually finds employment as a governess in the

⁹¹ Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace, "The Female Gothic: Then and Now," *Gothic Studies* 6.1 (2004): 1-7. Pages 1 -2. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=14860833&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>>

⁹² Brabon, pg. 1-2.

⁹³ Williams, 101.

mansion of a wealthy family with a long and dubious history. (...) She begins to fear that someone is trying to kill her, and that the master is most likely guilty in some way. But she remains, held by ties of love and loyalty to the child she has been hired to care for. Usually the threat turns out to be related primarily to a female force (the other woman, the sinister housekeeper, the madwoman in the attic, the master's dead wife). In the end, however, the heroine learns that this danger can be overcome, that the "supernatural" is merely the result of some human deception, and that the master loves her and her alone. Her worst fears arose from the terrors of an overactive imagination. (...) She and the master of the house are married and live happily ever after.⁹⁴

She adds that such a plot has been here with us since the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847, the contrastive literature appeared in the form of what she calls the Male Gothic with Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* of 1965. Thus, she introduces the concept of two different currents in the modern Gothic.

Talking of the same, but differing in the opinion of tradition, Russ believes, that the 'Modern Gothics', as she calls the same group of female novels that Williams is talking about, almost does not acknowledge connection with the Gothic tradition, for her they are more of a "crossbreed of *Jane Eyre* and *Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca*."⁹⁵ Most importantly, Russ distinguishes the House, Heroine, Country, Super-Male, The Other Woman, Shadow Male and actions as "Buried Ominous Secret" and "Secret is revealed" in her analysis of the modern Gothic.

According to Williams, these two traditions differ in the narrative technique, in their approach to the supernatural, and in plot. The Female Gothic limits the point of view of the protagonist, whereas the Male Gothic uses an effect derived from the multiplicity of points of view.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Williams, 101.

⁹⁵ Russ, 666.

⁹⁶ Williams, 102.

The supernatural, then, is explained in the Female Gothic, while the Male Gothic "posits the supernatural as 'reality'." Since 1995, this is has been no longer true. A famous example is the craze about Stephenie Meyer's novels *The Twilight Saga* that includes a clan of vampires and their transformation does not seem prospective. Importantly, a traditional Female Gothic has a happy ending: "the conventional marriage of Western comedy," while "the Male Gothic protagonist, (...) fails and dies."⁹⁷

This takes us to Ann Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror. According to Williams, Female Gothic excels in terror, while Male Gothic is the area of horror.⁹⁸

VI. A Little Stranger: Gothic as bulimic?

1. General Introduction

A Little Stranger, a novel by Scottish writer Candia McWilliam, was first published in 1989. It is a story of two women, who share two main issues: problematic approach to food and psychological problems, first one being the direct consequence of the other. The first of which, they do not admit and the second, they are unaware of, or unwanting to admit. There is a certain kind of lostness in their characters that is fatal for the roles they are taking up, their meeting is bound to be destructive.

The book explores some of McWilliam's favourite themes: "the prevalence of human misperception, the futility of contrived moral judgments, and (...) the horror of people gaining power over other people."⁹⁹ It is difficult to rank as to its genre, some claim it is in

⁹⁷ Williams, 103.

⁹⁸ Williams, 104.

⁹⁹ Michael R. Molino, "Little Stranger – review," *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 267* (Detroit: Gale, 2003) 03 Feb 2011

<<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CH1200010988&v=2.1&u=palacky&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>>

the tradition of Janite writers, having in mind the works of Jane Austen.¹⁰⁰

The story is rather simple and until the very end of book resembles the domestic novel very well. A wealthy family in the countryside hires a nanny to take care of their child. The plot revolves around the main protagonist's second pregnancy and her everyday life that is filled with absence of things to do. The society is very affluent, each of the neighbours has a nanny of their own. The nanny remains a little bit of a secret as she does not reveal her fiancé nor any details of her past. One day, she tells her employee that the child has blinded her in one eye. She does not seem to be bothered that much about the fact and life goes on. Gradually she loses a lot of weight, but her employer is fully submerged in her pregnancy. In the end, the nanny comes out as a secret bulimic and her employee admits an overeating disorder.

Since the publication of *A Little Stranger*, a new book appeared called *The Little Stranger*. From Sarah Waters, published in 2009, this is a full-blown Gothic ghost story with queer thematic. I therefore use full name of the book with the indefinite article to distinguish these two works.

2. Characters

Daisy

Daisy, the main protagonist, is telling the story in a style of a personal diary. Her thoughts and actions are momentarily very close to a stream of consciousness and the tone is very personal, she uses the language as if making her own notes, not explaining herself much or only in a way that is comprehensible to her. She presents insidious associations and vivid images in an original language, that is supposedly derived from her profession – a proofreader.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas M. Disch, "Nanny's Little Secret," *New York Times Book Review* (1989): 9. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. 03 Feb. 2011
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=30730881&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>

Today some of my friends and I were to meet at the house of Leonora, our closest neighbour. She was married to a man who had swarthy skin and blond hair, so he always looked healthy. He was as compact of energy as a battery; he had no languor. (61)¹⁰¹

Immediately at the start, we learn of her rather strange eating habits, describing herself as "raisin-like" when she says (13):

For lunch I had eaten approximately seventy black olives, of the type which is wrinkled and black as tar on a summer road. I accompanied them with a jug of black coffee. (14)

Daisy describes her liking for simplicity, she believes that "simple people" are more virtuous than the "faulty and sophisticated". (13) From her, it sounds more like an aristocratic benevolence towards the simpler ones. She is, however, devoted to make her life simple which recurs in her comments on her thoughts that she rather avoids:

(...)I thought he had as much right to be lazy, to have a time off thinking, as I had. When I had thoughts, I did not much like them. (68)

In contrast to Margaret, she describes herself dressed as a "scarecrow" and admits to using her clothes as a "uniform". (16) Despite that, she is an enormously wealthy lady of the house, but does not appear to revel in this position.

I dressed as a an ex-beauty, though it was not clear to me whether this was appreciated by others. I wore that day, as I almost did by then, a pair of men's jeans, a huge jersey and trodden-down party shoes. (16)

Margaret

Margaret is a young nanny, whom Daisy hires to take care of her four-year-old son. She claims to have a fiancé, but never talks about him, nor her family. She is very precise, bordering with an Obsessive-compulsive disorder.

¹⁰¹ Candia McWilliam, *A Little Stranger* (London: Pan Books, 1990) 61.

Some people have said I am too tidy myself. I find it satisfying to see everything in its place. (16-17)

She is almost good to be true: Daisy, although possessing a no real job to do, welcomes her as a saviour. The house has a separate part for Margaret and the child she takes care of, John, she is therefore awarded with great privacy. At the beginning Daisy observes:

She was short and I guessed that she had trouble her figure. (...) She had a clean look and was unexceptionally dressed something I do not find easy to achieve. (...) I wanted to tell her I did not like her scent, but I didn't have the stomach to say it. (15-16)

From the start, there is an informational gap between the two main protagonists. At first, Daisy seems to try to understand Margaret, but later in the book, she turns to talking to an invisible companion that will get all her jokes and associations.

In the nursery bathroom, she said, 'Where do you change?' I could not understand the question at first. Did she think I was a werewolf? (17)

Margaret obviously has no sense of humour or irony. Rather she "counted her time like her calories." (60) She is very systematic, when she leaves home for Christmas, she leaves a list of things to do for Daisy, which is detailed account that misses only on the part of Daisy's hygiene. Despite being only the nanny, she starts to push Daisy around. When Bet, the servant, offers Daisy a guinea pig for John dismisses the idea without questioning.

Margaret seems to put her systematic approach to her fight with food as well. As Daisy comments:

Food was of great importance to her, as adversary and as preoccupation. Margaret loved sweet things and her shopping bags were full of those strange foods made for consumers (...) desirous for no nourishment. (35)

Daisy notices Margaret's changing appearance while she is talking to her husband on the phone: "(...) I noticed – handspan waist. She seemed to be losing weight rather fast." (81) Nevertheless, Daisy openly despises her eating habits, she has enough to do with herself and constantly defends Margaret actions, still remembering, she is so grateful to have her.

The husband

Daisy's husband Solomon seems to be ever away. We learn of him from the sparse quotations that Daisy supplies, from phone calls. Meetings are brief, he seems like an episodic character. Quite surprisingly, Daisy approves of him being away and even says that everything he does is "for the best". (81) Affection between the two is not discussed, nor it would seem to occupy Daisy's mind, only very subtly:

I rather misused him, including his baroquely awful vocabulary. (82)

He is affluent, and leaves his empire to his wife, only to pop in to change his car, or to stay when the season is right – during the shooting season, he is off hunting, afterwards he leaves to London to amuse himself, country life obviously not satisfying him.

He wore his cars well, my husband. In the country they were green or nicely combat-muddied milk-white, of a square and accommodating cut. For town they were sharp and slim, though long enough for evening glamour. (70)

He is a man of business, and his main preoccupation is money. McWilliam talks about him as "terrible, cold, powerful man". His unmentioned occupation has a suspicious aura about. His son takes after him, and Daisy feels a very patriarchal way about the whole household as she says and the absent husband is still considered to be in charge of things: "It was a household used to male thrall."(77)

3. Gothic?

A Little Stranger contains two possible Gothic lines: a view of Margaret that she creates in her mind and a view of Daisy and the reader.

The point of view of Margaret is that of a mass-market Gothic with the formerly mentioned formulaic plot and fairytalish features. The point of view of Daisy is more complicated as she seems to be very well-read and even makes fun of the whole concept:

I wondered if the fiancé too was a fairy story, the reliable foil of fiction, in sharp contrast to the flashing attractions of Mr. Right. (130)

I would argue, that for Daisy, the modern Gothic is present at the very end of her story and internally in her pregnancy. Although she is a heroin in an abandoned country house and her husband is a powerful male, these are mere baits that Margaret uses.

The House

The house the family lives in, is, similarly to a Gothic mansion, abandoned, "not near anywhere", though in perfect surroundings, even paradisaal, their frugality emphasised with the phrase "rich core". (15) We do not see the house as an example of a claustrophobic dilapidated house, the interesting from the descriptions emphasise the ridiculous vastness of the estate. The most baffling description is provided when Daisy wanders through its six bedrooms while suffering from insomnia. The mood suddenly rushes into the cheapest paperback romance.

In another instance, we get a slight Gothic-like comparison, when Daisy remarks about the building: "It was of the sugary fawn brick which is friendly to the soft lichens which care only for clean air and graveyards" and are left assured that it is not a small humble house indeed. (84)

The Heroin

Daisy is indeed the one and the only possible heroin of the book. She, however, although succumbing to patriarchal conventions, does not fight against a male oppressor. To Margaret, she is the Other Woman, as Russ calls the rival of the heroin in a modern Gothic.¹⁰² She shares some qualities of the heroin from the point of view of the reader: but not those of a Gothic novel, more of a domestic novel. For Margaret, she is the embodiment of a Gothic evil and wicked woman, wealthy and keeping her husband from Margaret's reach.

As many argue, one of the quintessential differences of FG from the male Gothic, is the resolution of the supernatural at the end. As Williams points out: "the female tradition of Gothic explains the ghosts, the male formula simply posits the supernatural as a 'reality', a premise of this fictional world."¹⁰³

However, there is not even a hint of the supernatural in the book. It seems that McWilliams senses that it is expected of the genre as she teases:

I felt the foggy despair of the night when Margaret had raised spectres and then shown them to be only old sheets. (115)

Although we know, there is something going on behind the scene, the only thing we are bound to speculate about is that Margaret has a secret – more likely a crush on Solomon, the husband. Daisy does not face the typical struggle with the villain, or does she?

The Villainess

The issue with *A Little Stranger* is, the villain is not male. While reading her romantic paperbacks, Margaret applies its rules to the real life. In this aspect, *A Little Stranger* is deceptively Gothic: you can see the signs of Gothic, but they are simply used differently than expected.

¹⁰² Russ, 668.

¹⁰³ Williams, 103.

That is caused by the doubleness of the whole book. Margaret, the villainess, has a completely different point of view on the story, however, we do not realise this until the very end of the story. Margaret's Gothic is of the books she's been reading. She constructs her hallucination based on the rules of the genre. Solomon, the husband, is her desired Super-Male, that Russ describes.

Her book was *Patience Rewarded*; its cover showed a couple embracing between a large house and a large car. (119)

Margaret falls for the story uncritically and adopts the role of the heroine in her mind. She feels, indeed, that she is saving Solomon from that ugly and insufficient mother and wife, she is doing all this for a good cause.

I am glad it's your body, not mine,' she began each mad versicle, and then went on to explain why I would die if I had any sense of the proper thing to do. (...) She hoped that the baby would live (...) It would never know that its mother was a fool. (134)

Psychologically, this hallucinatory dream is a part of her eating disorder: literally of herself. It is her "thinspiration"¹⁰⁴ while she builds her ideal self, she digests and follows her literature as the Scripture. Another inspiration for Margaret seems to be television. At one point, Margaret excuses herself so that she can watch TV and later that evening Daisy comments on the shows that are on:

I could not see that there was much on television but serials about the effects of illness or of wealth. I could not differentiate between these programmes, though the outfits worn by the victims sometimes gave a hint, and the terminally ill, or those who impersonated them, appeared to wear even more make-up than the terminally rich. (24)

¹⁰⁴ The "pro-anorexia" movement that gathers eating disorders' sufferers and is often being criticised for promoting anorexia as a life style, runs online communities that are notorious for their photography galleries of thin and emaciated women that are used as so called thinspirations for women who in this way motivate themselves to starve.

Margaret also takes up the habit of listening to the radio all the time and in what turns out to be a slight foreshadowing of things to come, Bet, one of the servants, comes to the garden across the mud to tell Daisy that Margaret "can't listen out for [John] properly. She goes on to explain that "she can't hear him", because "she has her soundtracks on the whole time." (55) It turns out, that when Margaret does not have the radio on, she is using a portable audio player, to as we later learn, to listen to her books on the way as well. Daisy dismisses this as a kind of rivalry in the house between Margaret and Bet, as she points out at one time: "There had been this sort of jealousy between Bet and a nanny before (...)." (112)

When Daisy falls and wonders where Margaret could be, she thinks that she hears a loveplay on the radio, and even pities Margaret: "Poor girl, how lonely she must be, to omit to turn off that machine. She must fear silence." (118) Indeed, Margaret appears to need a supply of external distraction to sustain herself.

Her personality is constructed in the same way the Goth community members construct their identities. As Miklas and Arnold argue "the consumer typically chooses to read a particular work in order to live vicariously through the 'other' (i.e. their emotions, experiences and/or thoughts)." In this manner "(...) the consumer is provided with a possible blueprint for their self." If the Gothic once served as a model for women's emancipation and the women were role models of a fight against oppression, for the Goths it is now a model for the "extraordinary self". The basic idea of this constructed personality is its uniqueness and expression of "extraordinary experience". What Margaret resembles even more is the cinematic self when a person lives out a chosen character with the support of props such as the soundtrack. Margaret is living her "romance novel self", she has completely immersed herself in her fantasy. Triggered by her mental disease, the novel is not just "a safe vehicle for (...) [her] to live out [her] fantasies" anymore. A grave point to make, Miklas mentions how the Gothic helps some from the Goth community with

their every day life: they project themselves onto an alternative entity and that helps in "distancing them from both their actions and the results of their actions". In Margaret's case, what could have been only a "purposeful separation from everyday experience", took a wrong turn.¹⁰⁵ She is not fully aware of her actions: she is a novel heroin and a bulimic.

She hopes to receive new identity and new life through both. As Williams writes, "the Female Gothic heroin experiences a rebirth."¹⁰⁶ Margaret yearns so much in her romantic delusion for a true novel blood and drama that would affirm her heroin status. As Williams comments, the heroin is typically "rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger."¹⁰⁷

She told me, that what she hadn't expected was to be completely unhurt. She had imagined that he would rescue her, having found her just a little, becomingly, blooded (...). (133)

She develops that kind of possession of the romance heroin, she cannot imagine that the story could end differently because there is *ever* happily ever after. As Williams states that is inevitable for the heroin to realise in the end, she was wrong and "the master loves her and her alone."¹⁰⁸

Her revelation of the "Buried Ominous Secret" is a real feature of the modern Gothic.¹⁰⁹

The Super-Male

Solomon is a person in the background, he plays no role of a real Gothic suitor or even of an antagonist, though he is paradoxically

¹⁰⁵ Sharon Miklas and Stephen J. Arnold, "The Extraordinary Self: Gothic Culture and the Construction of the Self," *Journal of Marketing Management* 15.6 (1999): 563-576. *Business Source Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 5 Aug. 2011. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=2514539&lang=cs&site=ehost-live>>

¹⁰⁶ Williams, 103.

¹⁰⁷ Williams, 104.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, 101.

¹⁰⁹ Russ, 669.

at the very centre of the story: he is the prince charming that Margaret chooses in her delusion.

To be absent, however, is not untypical of the male characters so much as it might seem. In the *Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, a favourite author of McWilliam, the male character occupies the heroine's mind, but also is never present.

The way Solomon haunts the story is his indifference and coolness, he is a man of business, and his main preoccupation is money. McWilliam talks about him as "terrible, cold, powerful man". His unmentioned occupation has a suspicious aura about it. His son takes after him, and Daisy feels a very patriarchal way about the whole household as she says: "It was a household used to male thrall." (77)

Pregnancy

Ellis observes Gothic fight of a woman against her male oppressor as such:

in the feminine Gothic the heroine exposes the villain's usurpation and thus reclaims an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison.¹¹⁰

The enclosed space Daisy reclaims is not only her home, but more importantly her womb – the life of her child. The Gothic space and the fighting ground here is Daisy's belly. Similarly, Smith and Wallace talk of the FG "as a coded expression of women's fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body, most terrifyingly experienced in childbirth."¹¹¹

Daisy's body has become a portable prison, she is trapped in her own body that she secretly finds disgusting, something of what

¹¹⁰ Williams, 100.

¹¹¹ Smith, 1.

Scahill refers to as a "polluted container", while she is suffering from what seems to be a prepartum depression.¹¹² Coincidentally, it is the same condition that Guy, husband of Rosemary in *Rosemary's Baby* is trying to talk Rosemary into believing that she suffers.

In his study, Scahill presents a theory of Gynecological Gothic, and as a typical example uses Roman Polanski's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*.¹¹³ To define this field of Gothic, he uses examples from the modern cinema, but I would argue that we can find certain common characteristics that could be helpful considering Daisy's pregnancy. Scahill claims that in Gynecological Gothic, the womb is a contested terrain, and the pregnant female is beset both from without and from within.¹¹⁴ The Gynecological Gothic sees the child as "Other", which is usually used in Gothic terminology to signify the supernatural and the monstrous.¹¹⁵ Some features of this theory of the feelings of pregnant heroines are intrinsic of Daisy as well. The sense of "bodily invasion", when she talks about "a person of no gender" that "took my teeth".¹¹⁶ As I am discussing, Daisy has issues with her sense of self. On this matter, Scahill notes, that "as the fetus is given personhood, the maternal body is reduced, dehumanized, and erased"; and he further argues that "women have always had a hard time registering as complete, coherent citizens because of the troubling propensity of their bodies to become two".¹¹⁷ On one hand, we have Daisy: divided in two by her pregnancy, on the other, Margaret divided by her disease. Neither of them is complete. Scahill reveals as one possible interpretation of the pregnant female's body as a "vacant house haunted by specters and ancient evils that threaten to

¹¹² Scahill, 204.

¹¹³ Andrew Scahill, "Deviled Eggs: Teratogenesis and the Gynecological Gothic in the Cinema of Monstrous Birth", *Demons of the Body and Mind*, ed. Ruth Bienstock Anolik, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010) 197 – 216, 197.

¹¹⁴ Scahill, 198.

¹¹⁵ Scahill, 198. This designation in relation to children appears also in 2001 in Alejandro Amenábar's film *The Others*.

¹¹⁶ Scahill, 199.

¹¹⁷ Scahill, 204.

emerge."¹¹⁸ The Gothic house undergoes a reconstitution as "the even more feminine enclosed space of the maternal body."¹¹⁹

Furthermore, is something incomprehensible and uncanny about women's reproductive possibilities for men, that combined with the fear of letting women loose from the patriarchal bondage – the fear of their unpredictable behaviour after doing so. Victorian theory "identifies women as entities defined by and entrapped within their bodies, in contrast to the man, who is governed by rationality and capable of transcending the fact of his embodiment".¹²⁰ In the nineteenth century, Hurley further claims, "women were seen as incomplete human subjects".¹²¹ "The female body, (...), was intrinsically pathological. The disorders of the female body were inextricably linked to the female reproductive system."¹²²

The architectural parallel is nothing new. Vidler talks about "the notion that building *is* a body of some kind, the idea that the building embodies states of the body or, more importantly, states of mind based on bodily sensation, and the sense that the environment as a whole is endowed with bodily or at least organic characteristics."¹²³ In the Philippines, a traditional house called "fale" is a "dark windowless chamber" representing the womb.¹²⁴

It appears as the pregnancy is eating Daisy from within, the needed help from the outside, the husband protector is missing. Daisy talks of a weak sense of self, as she describes her feelings in advanced pregnancy: "A sense of the self has never been my strongest suit: I deemed it no dishonour that I was being dismantled from within." (67)

¹¹⁸ Scahill, 205.

¹¹⁹ Scahill, 207.

¹²⁰ Kelly Hurley, "Uncanny female interiors", *The Gothic Body*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 117-141. 119

¹²¹ Hurley, 119.

¹²² Hurley, 120.

¹²³ Anthony Vidler, "Architecture Dismembered," *Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: 1992) 69-84.

¹²⁴ Gerard Rey Lico, "Architecture and Sexuality: The Politics of Gendered Space", *Humanities Diliman*, Vol 2, No 1 (2:1) (January-June 2001) 30-44. Accessed 28 July 2011 at

<http://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/humanitiesdiliman/article/viewArticle/74>

Instead of the support she might need, she feels, she is bound to leave her husband alone:

I was restive and uncomfortable at night, sleepy by day, no companion for a man in spring-time.(66)

Her time is filled with writing letters that she is sending out to unknown people, rather than to her friends, which makes her feel increasingly more abandoned. With her aristocratic charm she says:

I was particularly touched and impressed by ordinary people. Now, after it all, I cannot imagine how I thought such a thing existed (...). (78)

She continues to fight with her pregnancy and develops symptoms of prepartum depression, such as insomnia.

All night I had read and wandered from bedroom to bedroom, seeking not sleep but a new confinement for my teeming body. I was reading like one starved. (...) I read too much too quickly and wanted really only to read long simple stories with happy endings. (80)

I was reading like one starved - Daisy continues to drop reference to weight in unusual associations, that we could suspect as coming from her unconsciousness or we can see them as cosmic irony in relation to Margaret's disease. As she is aware of her increasingly enlarging looks and when she sees herself in the side of her husband's car she refers to herself as "a pile of tyres". (70) In another instance she says: "Under the skin of us all, what you will find is fat."(79) Quite an unusual association when comparing Scots to the Irish.

Daisy's comments on her eating disorder such:

The pleasure was so rich and so simple, so harmless, so uncomplicated. (128)

At the same time, we have to have in mind the Margaret's belly as well. Margaret is also fighting with the prison of her own

body, but she is the exact reverse of Daisy. Symbolically, her belly is falling through her body, her physical appearance is closing in on her. Both of these women are "feeding" their own body traps on their own. How much we would want to villainise the man, we cannot. Nor is it justifiable to do so with the patriarchal society that supposedly brought these two women in such a situation, ultimately, the fight is their own responsibility.

If we see Margaret as the villainess, we have to also admit, that she is a prisoner of her disease and therefore not fully responsible for her actions. Even Margaret, then is not what we could call a typical malicious villain.

The reasons for the Gothic features in the book are internal, rooted in the mental diseases and the psyché of the two main protagonists.

Their conversations and approaches are filled with misunderstandings and misinterpretations, that we see quite deformed through Daisy's eyes. Those two are simply incompatible, as they live in two separate worlds. In one fleeting moment, Daisy accurately realises this fact:

I was rinsed with anger at myself for having at once assumed her own preoccupations identical with mine. (101)

Candia MacWilliams describes something that is weirdly familiar to women, in that aspect her work surely strikes a cord with the idea of the Female Gothic. I would argue, however:

It has the remote country house of a wealthy family. But there is no sense of a lineage or history. The house is by no means haunted. It is written by a woman, therefore perfect to signify as a female Gothic. But the features of a female Gothic do not fit. The heroin is not exactly a heroin: Daisy is closer to a shipwreck denying her doubts by not thinking. We have the villain, but it is a she. There is Gothic inside the whole frame, seemingly Gothic.

We find here a narrative mechanism typical for the Female Gothic. As Williams sums up: FG "generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view; we share both the heroine's often mistaken perceptions and her ignorance."¹²⁵ What seems more plausible, however is *A Little Stranger* as a parody of the Gothic. The patterns are almost eagerly expected, but never fulfilled in a way. The tone of the book, Daisy's peculiar humour, only adds to the parodical.

What could be argued as a feature of the modern Gothic is the social criticism of patriarchal society that puts women to their limits by the confusing demands that is imposing on them. Be thin, have babies, but be thin, please be thin. Work, but do not work too much, take care of the house, but be representative.

The story is also that of domestic horror. Daisy that is supposed to be happy, but feels that she is at her best only when she does not think too much about anything. Trapped on a remoted island, with a child that is hers but she does not really take care of and a husband perpetually missing. There is a hint of a golden cage and compliance with a life she might not know if she wants to lead.

A Little Stranger plays with the clichés and characteristics of the old Gothic genre. However, I believe it only uses these as means to an end. I hold the opinion that for it to be Gothic we necessarily need to perceive the work of art as such – as I've stated earlier in the text. There is no identification with Daisy throughout the book. The revelation is shocking and surprising even though there are major hints through the book of weird food behaviour. The novel desperately lacks a heroin to be an educational, empowering sort of Gothic for women. Nor can it be a romantic fantasy of identification with the hardships and a romantic get-together at the end.

Despite the novel being at times almost silly with language and description of a rather silly life of a bored wealthy heroin, I would

¹²⁵ Williams, 102.

argue, it is also way too realistic for it to be seen as Gothic. The problem is, that what is actually unsettling about *A Little Stranger*, is its realness. The sense of eerie is missing here, while the presence of eating disorders in our society is starting to be deemed normal, or even preferable. There are two possible ways of looking at that: paranoid, or of limitation. What I call paranoia, is admitting that Gothic has interfered with all the spheres of our lives. Therefore, the news from the Middle East are Gothic, how the news are given is Gothic and how the news are perceived is Gothic as well. With the paranoid gothicised approach, we simply stretch the non-existent definition of modern Gothic and believe that anything that is scary, twisted and presented in an uncanny or unsettling way, that touches on our hidden fear can be read as Gothic. This view uses the general anxiety in the society that is fed by the media. We get to hear news of the worst atrocities, kidnappings or incests, almost live via satellite. The feelings from these transmitted horrors generate a paranoia that makes us keep knives and pepper sprays in our pockets.

The view of limitation, is the one that I support. I am of the opinion, that we should try to limit modern Gothic, basically, to keep it alive. How ridiculous the lists of Gothic features and talks about conventional plots might seem, we need this for the modern Gothic as well, otherwise it dies out. I think there are many great instances of the modern Gothic, but it is misleading and hurting for the genre to apply the definition on works that do not fit the genre and only seem to be Gothic. In that case we have to talk about some Gothic features that the presented work has. We should not use the Gothic perspective from the start and approach the works with less bias.

In the case of *A Little Stranger*, there are so many hints that point towards Gothic and seemingly Gothic features, that it leads us to rank it as a modern Gothic novel. However, I would argue, that it really is more of a crossover of genres and I see it more as a blend of realism, social criticism and a farce with Gothic features. We see here

a grotesque of Gothic, in that the regular features are in their actuality inverted.

3. Language and style

"I have very firm reasons for using the vocabulary, I do. (...) I think that the charge of using difficult words in order as it were to adorn myself, (...) is, it's sexist."¹²⁶

A chapter on its own, Candia McWilliam has her very own way with words and a peculiar style of writing. She has been repeatedly criticised for these features of her work, some accused her of an "arcane vocabulary, impenetrable syntax, and obscure subject matter."¹²⁷ But as a recent review for her memoir states: "McWilliam knows perfectly well that she has a reputation for having 'swallowed the dictionary', yet she continues to relish extravagant language: this may be stubborn, but it is also brave."¹²⁸

At first glance, the text of *A Little Stranger* seems to be deceptively simple and plain. but it turns out to be a difficult read. Despite for the book being relatively short, it does not read that easy for Daisy's figurative language and for the fact the plot evolves rather slowly. A fitting comment on the style of writing McWilliam's writing says: "McWilliam believes 'style' to be something you simply can't get enough of: the more fancy phrases and frilly turns per paragraph the better."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Off The Page: Candia McWilliam*, prod. STV Productions, dir. Tina Wakerell, 1989, 25 min. 4 sec. 16.12.2010, Accessed 28 July 2011 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEApAbtIJxA>.

¹²⁷ Molino, 5.

¹²⁸ Andrew Motion, "What to Look for in Winter by Candia McWilliam," Rev. of *What to Look for in Winter*. In *The Guardian*, Saturday 28 August 2010. Access on 1 August 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/aug/28/candia-mcwilliam-winter-andrew-motion?INTCMP=SRCH>

¹²⁹ Francis Wheen, ed., "Nursery Crime," *Lord Gnome's Literary Companion* (London: Verso, 1994)

What strikes the reader at first, is the usage of bookish expressions that hint at a more elaborate style. Some reviewers described her style as "high" and mention that "she was often accused of pretension" saying that she "loves to build her sentences on tall arches".¹³⁰ Unusual words are used in ordinary context shifting the meaning of and leaving it up for interpretation, whether there is something more hidden behind the flowers that were "no longer bright, but incandescent". (25) The author often combines these words with some extraordinary metaphors and collocations. In addition, unexpected references are used: they shoot across many, leaving the bewildered reader ruthlessly behind. Sometimes a sentence that started innocently forms a tiny tangle, developing heavily as it goes on and breaking the neck of any inadvertence.

The book was intended to be bought rather than read; it was a category book of gossip, easier to write than a bird book or a tree book and less resistible. People have no certain profile in flight and no certain season of falling sap, so research need not be exhaustive. (25)

It does not help in the least that a flight profile is usually considered in aviation. Cooke remarks in relation to McWilliam's style: "You will (...) find sentences that require re-reading several times, the better to unpack their meaning, the full extent of their admission, and their evasion."¹³¹ Another classical example is a comparison of Daisy's son star assessment at school with ratings of a completely different kind:

There was a frieze showing the happier events in the life of Christ, and there was a list of names with stars against them. John seemed to come between decent brandy and a country-house hotel for conduct and was about mid-octane petrol academically. (33)

¹³⁰ Motion, *ibid.*

¹³¹ Rachel Cooke, "What to Look for in Winter: A Memoir of Blindness by Candia McWilliam", *Rev., The Observer*, Sunday 15 August 2010, Accessed 15 July 2011 at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/aug/15/candia-mcwilliam-what-to-look?INTCMP=SRCH>>.

Not knowing about a star rating system for leaded gas, the reader is baffled. There is always a thin line between "reading between the lines" that McWilliam so cherishes and losing track of the story. Some passages might be even annoying, particularly to a non-native speaker. In *A Little Stranger*, she enjoys delving into associations that unlike Woolf's lengthy ones are extremely brisk and tend to cut the association so short of any hints that they seem not to be associated at all. It can only be a word, or a collocation that surprises by its inevident appearance as it is delivered:

'I don't wear jewellery for work. It can scratch the little skins.' She made of children grapes, easily popped out of their plumpy skins. (13)

There is something rather unsettling about the image of children as grapes that could be popped out of skins with a piece of jewellery. The effect is achieved by the briskness and speed of the delivery combined with surprise at the unusual expression. This method creates some intense and hilarious moments with very special puns and jokes. The "usual" McWilliam joke would, however, be very unusual as well. Her domain in *A Little Stranger* is dry humour streaked with Daisy's sarcasm. Daisy shares a special kind of humour with her husband:

'I thought it was the kind of thing that sort of rather ugly girl likes. (...) They charged like the Light Brigade for it too.' (132)

When not talking to her husband, Daisy's remarks are often misunderstood by others, mostly the nanny Margaret. In conversations, this proves to be very unsettling again, developing an atmosphere of uneasiness. As Daisy acutely remarks:

I did not, as one is supposed to, grow better at judging an audience as I grew older. (23)

The between-the-lines sense and the uneasiness sometimes collide in a paranoia on the side of the reader who might think he is missing an inside joke – McWilliam has been accused of "snobbery"

because of her names dropping, but there seems to be a parallel with her exclusive humour as well.¹³² It is part of the trick, but it might repulse some. As McWilliam herself says on *A Case of Knives*:

I'm quite interested in gaps and silences, in art, and how they can be very suggestive. And that's what I've tried to do there. What people have left out saying, I hope, is suggestive. (...) I'm against telling all. I want the reader to contribute.¹³³

Nevertheless, with her approach, a partial loss of the conveyed is impossible to avoid. In *A Little Stranger*, we are left to implication of what Daisy thinks: although she is the main narrator she turns out to be unreliable and shockingly blind when the story comes to its finale.

From all of the above mentioned reasons, it is clear, that this is not a text that could be skim read at any part. Its sparsity is then its greatest opportunity and disadvantage at the same time. McWilliam does not analyse characters more than what would run a few sentences, a paragraph is generosity, instead, she brings on an unbelievable cadence at which unsettling comparisons and language keep on arriving and through these the engine is running through most of the book where time is measured by events such as the grouse season.

The language and its means are fully in concordance with what has been described as the "uneasiness" of Candia McWilliam.¹³⁴ I cannot find a more suitable word for *A Little Stranger*. I can only add other "un-words" to the list: unsettling, uncomfortable, uncanny and unintelligible. Apart from that: wordy ("I use language to include not

¹³² Motion, *ibid.*

¹³³ *Off The Page.*

¹³⁴ William Lyons, "Scottish author reveals her battle to overcome alcoholism", *The Scotsman*, 18 August 2004, Accessed 16 July 2011 at <http://news.scotsman.com/alcoholandbingedrinking/Scottish-author-reveals-her-battle.2556042.jp>.

exclude"), sparse and candid – in the limited point of view of Daisy, we are reading what is very close to her uncensored diary.¹³⁵

Endorsed in the book by Daisy's Dutch background and her profession as a proofreader, many original coinages are used as for instance the "unmisshapen body" said about a friend from the neighbourhood. (87) In chapter 2, we are treated to a quick linguistic excursion to the problems of Dutch speakers in English, then Daisy comments of Margaret's "standard English" only to compare it to the English of the "vendeuses". (20-21) Another seemingly French word comes a few pages later – "cuisinaste". (24)

As Cooke notes "at her best, (McWilliam) can do something remarkable with words".¹³⁶ The title of the book is also an elaborated play on words and it stems from Daisy's experience: there is a little play on the word "stranger" throughout the book. The first occurrence of "stranger" takes place in chapter 3:

'Time for a new addition, and I'm meaning that with an "a". Margaret would like that. A little stranger for us all. Goodnight, love.' (29)

Sometimes, the unborn child is being talked about. Every time, the word appears in the book, it is a marker. When Margaret and Johnny leave for London, Daisy comments on her feelings:

It was strange to be without her, stranger really than being without my son. (84)

At the very end, of the book, it appears bringing on the final transformation:

Margaret had been the stranger whom our family could not accomodate. (...) What was the strangest thing of all? I took her in

¹³⁵ Colin Waters, "Candia McWilliam - AN INTERVIEW," *Scottish Review of Books*, 02 November 2009, 7 Aug 2011 <http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=227:andia-mcwilliam-an-interview-srob&catid=21:volume-2-issue-3-2006&Itemid=61>

¹³⁶ Cooke, *ibid.*

because I hated her on sight, and was ashamed of myself for doing so.
(135)

As the whole story is turned upside down, so is the leitmotif and the focus of the word "stranger" shifted. We are left hanging in between the noun and the adjective. Suspecting McWilliam of her keen reading, thorough education and regular Sunday school attendance, I also turn to the classical translation of the Bible for a possible interpretation. A quotation from *The King James Bible* could have easily been the inspirational source for the title:

And she bare *him* a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land.¹³⁷

All in all, language is an essential part of Candia McWilliam's writing. It is bound to be criticised by some and found unbearable by many a reader. Whether we describe it as "out of kilter"¹³⁸, or "a wrought, complicated fusion of the plain and the fancy"¹³⁹ we cannot possibly overlook it. As Shilling further observes:

"McWilliam's prose has always had a talent to annoy. (...) viewed in a certain light, [it] can seem positively insolent."

In an interview from 2006, Candia McWilliam says about her usage of language:

What I feel is that the language belongs to all of us. As a Scot, I am made of language. (...) We possess the language, each of us. (...) I never use a word in order to clobber a reader. If the word is the right word, it will suggest itself to me. (...) As for the 'thesaurus swallowing' tag, I've said it again and again – I have never possessed a thesaurus. A thesaurus is predicated on an untruth, that such a thing

¹³⁷ *King James Bible*, Exodus 2:22. Accessed 15 July 2011. <<http://bible.cc/exodus/2-22.htm>>

¹³⁸ David Sexton, "A once-beautiful novelist Candia McWilliam calls herself 'a fat ghost'— how far should a writer go?", *London Evening Standard*, 4 Aug 2010, Accessed 28 July 2011 at <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/lifestyle/article-23863376-a-once-beautiful-novelist-calls-herself-a-fat-ghost-how-far-should-a-writer-go.do>>.

¹³⁹ Jane Shilling, "What To Look for in Winter by Candia McWilliam: review", *The Telegraph*, 29 Jul 2010, Accessed 28 July 2011 at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/7916369/What-To-Look-for-in-Winter-by-Candia-McWilliam-review.html>>.

as synonyms actually exist. If you are trying to be an exact, poetic writer, they hardly do. I'm not using language as self-adornment. I'm uninterested in my own ego as I write. (...) I just like language like I'm tall. I'm not tall to be above other people, and I don't try to learn more about the language to be above other people. The language is to connect.¹⁴⁰

4. Candia McWilliam

as a Gothic figure: "a fat ghost"¹⁴¹

If we should measure the level of Gothicity of the work including the life and person of the author, Candia McWilliam would score very high in the rank. Though an award winning novelist for her *A Case of Knives* and *A Little Stranger*¹⁴², in recent years, she has become known primarily for her addiction to alcohol and an extremely rare condition – blespharospasm. She would even call herself "a fat ghost"¹⁴³ in an interview, being as sarcastic and unscrupulous about herself as she is in her writing. Her latest biographical book about the experience *What to Look for in Winter* from 2009 is receiving a lot of press. The obscure disease prevents the sufferer from opening their eyes.

Behind my eyelids my eyes continued to function, so I was aware of light and darkness: I merely could not see (...) I cannot wink any longer, nor wear eye make-up. But I can see, as long as I have eight Botox injections in my amended eyes every three or so months for the rest of my life.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Waters, *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Sexton.

¹⁴² "Candia McWilliam, Biography," *Contemporary Writers*, The British Council. Accessed online 18 July 2011 at <http://www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth65>

¹⁴³ David Sexton, "A once-beautiful novelist Candia McWilliam calls herself 'a fat ghost'— how far should a writer go?," *London Evening Standard*, 4 August 2010, Accessed 18 July 2011 at <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/lifestyle/article-23863376-a-once-beautiful-novelist-calls-herself-a-fat-ghost-how-far-should-a-writer-go.do>>

¹⁴⁴ Candia McWilliam, "Blind but with perfect eyes," *The Sunday Times*, 6 September 2009, Accessed 28 July 2007 at

<http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article6823188.ece>

Born in Edinburgh in 1955, she witnessed her mother's death at the age of nine. She was then sent to various boarding schools and gradually became estranged from her father and even adopted by other families. When 15, she won a Vogue talent contest about which she says: " I think everyone must not have sent in entries. They couldn't see to write. All Vogue couldn't see to read, more likely, through the mascara and the black darkness."¹⁴⁵ She received university education at Cambridge and afterwards worked for Vogue. She says of the experience: "We used carbon paper and copy had to be glued down with a gum which was made from the feet of cows. I was violently allergic to the cow gum. So I vomited a lot. In addition, it was important to be thin, so I just stopped eating. There was competitive thinness. (...) It was a privilege to have worked there, but I didn't take advantage of it. I was so frightened I stopped going in."¹⁴⁶ After three marriages, one to an earl, she found herself suffering from alcoholism, which she openly disclosed at the Edinburgh book festival. She admits to hiding vodka in an iron and drinking disinfectants.¹⁴⁷

In 2006, she became blind. Only thanks to an article that she wrote, she received an experimental surgery that saved her from her rare disease. If the press had once been all abuzz with her beauty, the same now applies to the contrary.

VI. Conclusion

How problematic it is to define the term Gothic itself, so it is with the definition of its application in literature. Even if we try to list the typical features or characters we never seem to be able to define the Gothic satisfactorily.

¹⁴⁵ *Off the Page*.

¹⁴⁶ Waters.

¹⁴⁷ William Lyons, "Scottish author reveals her battle to overcome alcoholism," *The Scotsman*, 18 Aug 2004, 12 Aug 2011
<http://news.scotsman.com/alcoholandbingedrinking/Scottish-author-reveals-her-battle.2556042.jp>

The modern Gothic becomes even more blurred with the application of psychoanalysis and other modern theories. The advent of Gothic Studies is marked by introduction of a "Gothic reading" of a text that bears the danger of misinterpretation.

The Female Gothic was recognised as a part of the Gothic Studies in the 70s. Its aim is to concentrate on Gothic texts that are to do with female in all forms, mainly with the texts written by female authors. As a subfield, it suffers its problem with the definition and also with the heritage of feminism that has been a founding theory since its appearance.

Candia McWilliam's novel *A Little Stranger* is a modern novel with Gothic features. Its ranking among the Gothic, or the Female Gothic is problematic. The work exhibits certain Gothic elements, such as the abandonment, abundance of wealth, dark and bloody secret of one of the protagonists. In the subfield of the Female Gothic, it appeals to the idea of an enclosed space and position of the woman in the society. The most haunted space of the novel is the idea of a woman's womb and woman's belly. The Gothic space has moved from the outside on the inside.

Other genres that the work manifests are that of the domestic novel, psychological novel and farce. It can also be seen as a work of social criticism within realism.

Candia McWilliam is an original Scottish author with a peculiar writing style and language. She is often criticised for her complicated language, which on the other hand some find enriching.

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VII. Shrnutí

Cílem mojí práce byla analýza románu Candie McWilliamové z hlediska tradice gotického románu.

Ve své práci se nejprve zabývám definicí termínu "Gothic" jako takového. Jeho definice je problematická, na což upozorňuji krátkým exkurzem do etymologie slova. Tento termín se během staletí měnil, jeho původní význam vztahující se k barbarským kmenům byl v renesanci přisouzen středověké architektuře. V 18. století, kdy se v architektuře objevuje revivalismus středověkého stylu vzniká současně v literatuře román, který využívá architektonických prvků středověkého období a atmosféry strachu. Horace Walpole, který je považován za zakladatele gotického románu, je také prvním, kdo v souvislosti s touto literaturou používá přídomek "gotický".

Tradiční gotická tradice je definovatelná skrze historické vymezení tohoto období na dobu 18. století a začátek století devatenáctého. Typickými prvky, které jsou s touto literaturou spojovány je nadpřirozeno, užití prostředí evokujícího středověk, užití jistých klišé, a důraz na napětí.

Moderní gotická tradice je velmi obtížně definovatelná. Gotické prvky se zde svévolně přetvářejí a nabývají mnoha podob. Důležitou roli zde hraje esej Sigmunda Freuda o "unheimlich" z roku 1919, která do čtení a interpretace gotických textů zavádí psychoanalýzu. Někteří kritici se shodují, že záleží především na pohledu čtenáře a autora, zda text posuzuje jako gotický.

Tradice ženského gotického románu byla z Gothic Studies vydělena teprve v 70. letech. Od začátku byla spojována s feminismem, který také přispěl k jejímu vzniku. Tato tradice v rámci své literární kritiky dnes čelí mnoha problémům. Zvažuje se nahrazení názvu "Female Gothic" jinými, nebo jejich přídavná zavedení pro

lepší specifikaci. Za tradiční téma ženského gotického románu je považováno utlačování ženy patriarchálním systémem.

Kniha *A Little Stranger* skotské autorky Candie McWilliamové se objevila na pultech v roce 1989. Vypráví příběh bohaté rodiny, která si najme chůvu na výchovu svého malého syna. Příběh vykazuje některé prvky, které by mohly dílo zařadit do tradice ženského gotického románu. Gotický prostor v tomto románu představuje ženské lůno a břicho. Boj proti patriarchátu zde není zcela jednoznačný, jelikož dvě hlavní hrdinky bojují spíše samy se sebou a mezi sebou. Je zde ale přítomna společenská kritika v rámci Dílo obsahuje prvky psychologického románu, realismu, frašky a žánru "domestic novel", a proto ho pouze za gotické neoznačuji.

Candia McWilliamová je skotská autorka narozená v Edinburghu v roce 1955. Další její významnou knihou je oceněný román *A Case of Knives*. Její díla se vyznačují velmi bohatým a barvitým jazykem a osobitým stylem. V současnosti vyšla její poslední kniha pod názvem *What to Look for in Winter*, která dokumentuje její boj s alkoholismem a vzácnou chorobou blesfarospasmem.