

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Filozofická fakulta

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Tereza Malcharová

**Exploration of the Significance of Gothic Spaces in *The Italian*,
Northanger Abbey, and *A Little Stranger***

Ema Jelínková, Mgr., Ph.D

Olomouc 2011

PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval(a) samostatně a uvedl(a) v ní předepsaným způsobem všechnu použitou literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 10.8. 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Part

1 GENERIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GOTHIC FICTION	6
1.1 Generic Context of Gothic Fiction	6
1.1.1 Gothic Origins	7
1.1.2 Early Gothic writing and Romantic Transformation	8
1.1.3 Gothic Fiction in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century	11
1.1.4 Gothic Fiction in the Twentieth century and Postmodernism	14
1.2 Historical Context of Gothic Fiction	16
1.2.1 Rise in Popularity in Gothic Fiction	16
1.2.2 Gothic Fiction in the 19th and 20th Century	21
1.3 Female Gothic Literature	23
1.4 Conclusion	25
2 GOTHIC SPACES	27
2.1 Popular Gothic Spaces in the 18th Century	27
2.1.1 Mountainous Landscape in the Southern European Countries	28
2.1.2 The Gothic Castle and Medieval Ruins	30
2.1.3 The Institution of the Catholic Church	32
2.2 Spaces in the 19th and 20th Century Gothic Literature	33
2.3 Conclusion	37

Practical Part

3 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN <i>THE ITALIAN</i> BY ANN RADCLIFFE	38
4 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN <i>NORTHANGER ABBEY</i> BY JANE AUSTEN	48
5 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN <i>A LITTLE STRANGER</i> BY CANDIA MCWILLIAM	53

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

WORKS CITED

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature by all accounts presents phenomena whose importance to and extent of influence on the development of more mainstream literary genres has instigated debates over several centuries. Among these various phenomena contemporary researchers still inspect the gloomy and mysterious spaces of the peculiar 'genre,' in whose shades and darkness they continuously find new meanings and messages. Before discussing the significance of Gothic spaces and their application in individual works of fiction, however, it is essential to examine thoroughly both the generic and historical context of Gothic fiction. From its inception Gothic fiction was considered as a literary experiment rather than a serious and independent genre that would have been able to build a continuing tradition. Blending together elements of medieval romance and the novel, Gothic authors relinquished portraying events based on observations from everyday life and instead focused on fantastic and supernatural adventures that emphasised the reader's entertainment rather than his or her education. These imaginative attempts did not usually receive affirmative approbation and acceptance among critics as they hardly corresponded with prevailing Enlightenment literary requirements marked by simplicity and order. Nevertheless, it accorded with the shifting taste of the growing bourgeois society at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which did not always understand or appreciate the aristocratic literary heritage.

Even though Gothic literature flourished in the last decades of the eighteenth century, its popularity did not have a long duration. Though Gothic literature did not aspire to be received as a homogeneous genre, it did develop certain stereotypical patterns characterised by exotic and Catholic settings, fainting innocent heroines, demonic villains and cruel bandits, and supernatural and terrifying incidents. Though these unifying factors served Gothic fiction's purposes well in establishing innovative and fascinating spheres of exploration, after a while they started losing their appeal and attractiveness. Within several decades the quality of Gothic writings degraded and it became instead a synonym for sensational and cheap fiction that merely entertained masses greedy for thrills and excitement. Therefore, sated with stories which no longer satisfied the readers

of more complicated and complex society in the first half of the nineteenth century, Gothic fiction of that kind almost disappeared. Its themes and devices began either to disperse among the mainstream genres or to take on the likenesses of their darker counterparts.

Gothic elements still remained a powerful tool in literature, though, as they stood as symbols for the various fears, threats, desires and taboos that emerged alongside the celebrated changes and progress of the following centuries. As Fred Botting testifies:

Gothic signifies a writing of excess. It appears in the awful obscurity that haunted eighteenth-century rationality and morality. It shadows the despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism and individualism and the uncanny dualities of Victorian realism and decadence. Gothic atmospheres -- gloomy and mysterious -- have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of laughter. In the twentieth century, in diverse and ambiguous ways, Gothic figures have continued to shadow the progress of modernity which counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values.¹

In other words, Gothic elements such as figures and spaces incarnated various cultural anxieties and drawbacks that accompanied the world's progress. Gothic architecture and spaces presented a platform for individuals' transgressions and excesses, which threatened the stability of the whole society and its order. Thrilling their readers' fantasy with everything from dark castles and mountainous landscapes in the eighteenth century to the labyrinthine streets of the city in the nineteenth century and remote planets in twentieth century, Gothic writers of the time inserted their unofficial perspectives and secret messages into the shades of these spaces, alerting and warning their readers against possible consequences of the world's development. To summarise, in order to truly grasp the true meaning of the threats lurking in the suffocating atmosphere of Gothic spaces, readers must thoroughly familiarise themselves with the specific background that stoked the unique literary and historic experiences of Gothic authors.

¹ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) 1-2.

In order to understand adequately the usage of spaces in *The Italian*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *A Little Stranger*, it is necessary to take into account that all three authors were women, who, for one reason or another, chose Gothic fiction as their selected mode of expression. Indeed, it was not accidental. As Punter notes, "It is now becoming a critical common place that one of the important features of Gothic is that it was in its inception a 'women's fiction', written by and for women."² The fact that women plentifully applied Gothic fiction and its devices leads contemporary researchers to reexamine the roots of this 'genre' from a different perspective. It is now obvious that women's employment of Gothic 'genre' had something to do with their social status during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There was a strict division between activities that men and women were created for and places they belonged to. The security of the house was assigned to women, whereas men dominated the public life. Women who occasionally interfered into male matters were seen as rebelling against the laws of nature and were condemned and perceived as highly inappropriate and even insane. Writing and other creative skills undoubtedly fell into the category over which men held control. Therefore, women who desired to challenge their artistic abilities in writing had to choose a genre which was not in the centre of general attention or was seen as subsidiary. Moreover, they often had to alter the content of their books so that they were in accordance with the generally approved social dogma as well as the rigid expectations of the patriarchal system. These binding circumstances often forced women to either disregard their creative authorship and skills or encode their desired message within the text that it would be visible only to those for whom it was intended.

Taking into consideration all these issues, the female literary tradition seemed to be built on very odd and peculiar foundations. In other words, by discovering the controversial quality of the Gothic 'genre' women found a way to pass down unobserved an unofficial historical account of female confinement within the values and rules of the entrenched patriarchy and thus succeeded in building up a female literary heritage for the next generation of women authors. Even though Ann Radcliffe's, Jane Austen's, and Candia McWilliam's life

² David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic* (Harlow: Longman, 1996) 191.

experiences were separated by the centuries, each of them derived their works from the legacy of female Gothic literature and thus paid tribute to their literary foremothers.

This thesis, therefore, will reveal the true face of the secrets that all three authors concealed in the labyrinthine spaces of their particular novels. Employment of various kinds of Gothic spaces, such as a castle, abbey, or a familiar home, was significant because it symbolised the heroines' as well as the author's confinement, confusion and loneliness in the matrix of social relations, namely, within a society whose rules were designed by men and from which they were trying to exit. This work, then, focuses on the different ways in which Radcliffe, Austen, and McWilliam enabled their heroines to break out and escape from these debilitating scenes of bondage.

1 GENERIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GOTHIC FICTION

Before discussing and comparing individual works of fiction, it is essential to understand their generic and historical context. As for the generic context, it best serves a reader to identify what sort of text he/she is dealing with and helps him/her to classify it as an appropriate type of literature.³ In other words, after familiarising him/herself with the specifics of individual genres a reader should be, for example, able to differentiate various works of fiction or recognise a writer's contribution to the genre in a way in which he/she can follow or disprove the established generic conventions and patterns. Concerning the historical context, it helps the reader to understand the differences in values shared by the writers of the same historical period, and it also shows the impact of the writers' perspective and experience on their writing. In order to comprehend correctly Gothic fiction's contribution to and impact on the development of world literature, it is then important to study both its generic and historical background from the beginning up to the present time. The following chapter, therefore, will address the conditions that gave the mode an opportunity to arise and the forces that shaped it throughout the following centuries

1.1 Generic Context of Gothic Fiction

From the very beginning, critics and literary appraisers did not consider Gothic writing as an independent genre and they degraded it as a sub-genre or rather a hybrid form that did not deserve greater attention. Drawing inspiration from various literary sources, the Gothic authors often transformed or incorporated characteristics of the existing genres into their texts. Throughout the course of the centuries it became, therefore, a genuinely difficult task to define or classify Gothic writings as a homogenous genre.⁴ As David Punter noted, the writings of the Gothic purview were first distinguished because of stereotypical patterns such as "an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence

³ see John Peck, Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 1.

⁴ see Botting, *Gothic* 14.

on archaic settings, a prominent use of supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense”⁵ However, such consistency started breaking down during the middle of the nineteenth century and Gothic motives began to diffuse among various other genres, modes and even media. It may thus seem that the era of Gothic fiction did not last long and its impact on the development of literature was only marginal. However, as Victor Sage points out, “the actual history of critical opinion is much more diverse and interesting than such a literary-historical judgement would give us the right to expect.”⁶ The impact of the Gothic fiction thus can be seen much further. Dealing with such themes as fear, terror, taboo, violence, corruption, and hypocrisy, it still presents an active arena in the current complex and chaotic world, in which people feel lost and alienated amidst wider social values and norms. In other words, due to the timeless validity of its guiding archetypes, the influence of Gothic fiction can be traced in many outstanding works even in this present time.

1.1.1 Gothic Origins

In order to fully understand the reasons behind the emergence of Gothic writings, it is essential to explore the genre of fiction that also appeared in the eighteenth century, the novel. At first, literary critics saw this coming trend with concern, as argued by Botting: “Novels and romances were far from being completely acceptable pastimes for a member of a polite society.”⁷ In other words, the writers shifted their interest from subject matter shaped explicitly by religious perspectives to that of depicting the everyday experiences of ordinary people. It was obvious that the rising interest in the novel form could not be held back, therefore, literary critics came up with patterns of acceptability according to which certain novels were approved. These novels, as Peck and Coyle testify, were pledged to “have a point and a purpose,” and had to follow the neoclassical eighteenth-century pattern derived from the values of the Augustan period of the

⁵ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1996) 1.

⁶ Victor Sage, *The Gothic Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990) 8.

⁷ Botting, *Gothic* 49.

Roman Empire.⁸ The novels, above all, were to educate and elevate peoples' sense of morality and taste. Such a model appeared in the works of Richardson and Fielding, who fully respected the official canon and divested their novels of both fanciful, unreal adventures as well as emotions. Nevertheless, as Punter noted, "at a simpler level, the principles of the Enlightenment never came into easy relationship with the novel form, in its realistic or any other manifestation."⁹ Despite the fact that realistic novels were very popular among the general readership, there was also a rising interest in comic novels and romances in the second half of the eighteenth century. The market was flooded with imagined stories that preferred unusual exotic settings from the past to the familiar and recognisable world of everyday life. As for Gothic fiction, it presented without a doubt one of the most interesting phenomena among these new prevailing forms of literary prose. Its origins derived from the medieval romance brought to England from France during the seventeenth century. However, rather than stories of love and chivalry, the Gothic writings, as Peck and Coyle claim, concentrated on "the more sensational side of romance" and explored "the irrational passions of the mind."¹⁰ A new 'genre' blended together both fantasy and realism and thus seemed to stand between romance and the novel. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is usually considered to be the first attempt of such a project. On one hand he related his narrative to the older tradition of prose romance, but on the other he was influenced by the rising prominence of the new realistic novel. But though this new form proved formative, early Gothic fiction also drew its inspiration from sensationalism, Graveyard poetry, fairy tales, and Shakespearean drama.

1.1.2 Early Gothic Writings and Romantic Transformation

In terms of popularity and quantity, interest in Gothic fiction significantly rose toward the end of the eighteenth century. The 1790s, often called the decade of Gothic fiction, birthed authors such as Mathew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe, whose works were supposed to be the only Classical Gothic novels. Limited by

⁸ Peck and Coyle, *The Literary Terms and Criticism* 115.

⁹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 24.

¹⁰ Peck and Coyle, *The Literary Terms and Criticism* 131.

the values and politics of the eighteenth century rationalism, both authors, like Walpole, tried to search for a new style of narrative that would enable them to express their feelings and thoughts. As Punter argues, “Radcliffe and Lewis were not writing, as Fielding and his follower had been, behavioural histories of individuals, but fables about those points of vision and obsession where individuals blur into their own fantasies.”¹¹ In other words, they preferred depicting an imaginary world of supernatural, fear, and terror in contrast to the mundane reality of eighteenth century life. Even though the Gothic characters were still bound by the conventions of the day, these authors gave them room to release their minds and inhibition into the realms of Gothic uncertainty. And unlike their realistic counterparts, Gothic writers portrayed characters with a rather blurred sense of reality and who were not able to articulate their thoughts expressly when encountering breathtaking natural landscapes. Content of the book that enabled the liberation of one’s mind thus presented a serious threat to the social stability that stood on Enlightenment values. In order to avoid criticism, the Gothic authors, especially Radcliffe, made attempts at the end of their books to explain away all the irrational and supernatural dark adventures and place the reader back within the limits and light of the eighteenth century framework. However, expelling and punishing all these decadent and disquieting elements at all costs was a rather unconvincing and ambivalent effort. Not only the content but also the style of the narrative proved to be inconsistent with the demands on the proper work of realistic prose. Gothic writers took advantage of rich descriptions of the characters’ states of mind so that they could express, for instance, the sublime and horror of Gothic spaces and the vices and dark thoughts of their villains. They filled the pages with characters’ emotions and moods, thus impeding the reader in distinguishing the boundary between the factual and fictional worlds. Such a technique thus blurred rather than supported the world of order. Consequently, the writers often had to distort their narratives in ambivalent attempts to please critics.

The texts of a ‘genre’ of Gothic fiction written within the years 1764 (*The Castle of Otranto*) and 1820 (*Melmoth the Wanderer*) did not seem to monitor

¹¹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 64.

major development in terms of employed themes, settings, and devices. However, they were affected by another intellectual, literary, and cultural movement, Romanticism, which appeared in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. As Peck and Coyle write, “Unlike earlier writers, the romantics do not turn to God as the source of order, nor is order sought in society: what the romantics seek is to find a harmony in life which is at one with a pattern that can be found in the natural world.”¹² As for Gothic literature, it transformed rather to a murky counterpart of the Romanticism that transgressed its ideals of human individuality and imagination. Sublime of the natural landscape or a castle no longer presented a source of terror but it served as a tool of expressing the individual’s confused mind which was shaken by the excessiveness of emotions and passions. Internalisation of anxieties thus indicates one of the most notable changes in the image of the ‘genre’. Therefore, the main hero in Gothic fiction was often portrayed as a lost wanderer passing aimlessly through outlying landscapes that both accentuated his moods and provided sanctuary from society’s lack of understanding. In order to express a vagabond’s inner struggles between rebellious thoughts against social values and unsuccessful efforts to fit in its fold, authors used the technique of first-person narrative. Seeing all these dilemmas in such a straightforward way, an outcast even became a hero in the eyes of readers who were made to sympathise with the reprobate, who suffered unjustly at the hands of institutions that held power. The image of the Gothic wanderer became a great inspiration for the outstanding Romantic poets at that time such as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats. Moreover, the wanderer and other Gothic symbols, such as the vampire and the seeker of forbidden knowledge that appeared and were popular in the early nineteenth century, influenced the writings of many well-known prose authors, for example, Mary Shelley’s horror story *Frankenstein* and Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*.¹³ These books also showed upcoming changes in themes, devices, and narratives of Gothic writings. The turn of the century brought enormous industrial, technological progress that replaced nature as a dominant power in society. This move towards the city took Gothic horrors closer to the reality and came up with characters such as Frankenstein who

¹² Peck and Coyle, *The Literary Terms and Criticism* 5.

¹³ see Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 88.

doubled the nature of the created monster and thus indicated the fact that also ordinary people are responsible and active partakers in crimes and shortcomings of the time. Discovering a beast within a human, the Gothic authors needed a new way of narrative that would describe an individual's struggle with feelings of betrayal, disillusion and guilt. Botting testifies that:

The complexity, the confusing density of the narrative frames, do not, like conventional Gothic texts, restore a moral order or explain a mystery, but suggest that the human condition is as inescapable as the narrative labyrinth itself, a relentless chain of cruel events without purpose, unity, or meaning.¹⁴

By applying complicated narratives the Gothic authors articulated the individuals' inability to escape from both the real and the imagined horrors of the external world as well as from the newly discovered internal quality of the dark psychological self. In an increasingly complicated and fragmented world that did not offer distinct boundaries for social behaviour, one could easily feel a lack of guidance in the search for balance and harmony in life. Such awareness of the complexity of society and also the human mind led the Gothic authors to explore new avenues for narratives in which they approached human existence from both objective and subjective points of view.

1.1.3 Gothic Fiction in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

From the 1790s the book market was glutted with cheap sensational Gothic romances and novels which, however, quickly lost popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century. People were no longer interested in or addressed by the stereotypical fancy adventures of Gothic fiction and began looking for alternative styles and forms that would correspond with the changes taking place in their lives. Therefore, writers began to search for new ways of writing that would better reflect the image of transforming society. In order to meet readers' demands the writers finally inclined to employ a genre of a novel. As Peck and Coyle explain, "The Victorian period is the great age of a novel, possibly because this was the only form that could expand enough to cope with the scale and

¹⁴ Botting, *The Gothic* 109.

complexity of Victorian society as it expanded and changed.”¹⁵ Authors such as Charles Dickens set a trend of realistic novels and thus concluded the tradition of Gothic fiction established by Walpole, Lewis and Radcliffe. However, Gothic devices still lingered in their writings, helping express peoples’ apprehensions of that time and evoking feelings of terror and horror in the reader. In the scope of the realistic and sensation novel characters struggled with new villains who arose from industrial, scientific, urban and also domestic environs and endangered them in the immediate closeness of their homes instead of in remote and wild landscapes. Despite the fact that home was supposed to be the last refuge from a corrupted and materialistic world, it often turned into a nightmarish horror in the form of the past sins of fathers and guilty secrets that haunted the ordered circle of the Victorian family. Dangers impended from the familiar and social world brought a sort of uncanny feeling that replaced the sublime awe that was typical for early Gothic fiction. Botting refers to the usage of various devices such as “doubles, mirrors, and the concern with modes of representation; the scientific transgression of accepted limits; the play of internal and external narrations, of uncertain psychological states and uncanny events, ...” which were applied to induce such a desirable effect.¹⁶ Later in the century there appeared the trend of the so-called ‘decadent Gothic’ that borrowed older Romantic images of the vampire and doubles that embodied transmuted Victorian threats that were at the time considered criminal and sexual in form. Such an example can be seen in Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Both novels give a realistic image of peoples’ life in modern London streets, however, the sudden re-appearance of archaic images of doubles and vampires brought to life the mythical and occult barbaric past and symbolism that was formerly used in original Gothic and romantic fiction. Moreover, the choice for the unusual fragmented narrative only enhanced the mysterious atmosphere in which the reader partly and slowly uncovered hidden secrets and dark truths in the form of journals, letters, and legal documents. At first sight the image of the archaic vampire had nothing in common with the modern rational human liberated from primitive and also religious superstitions. Nevertheless, by applying

¹⁵ Peck and Coyle, *The Literary Terms and Criticism* 6.

¹⁶ Botting, *Gothic* 123.

Darwin's and Freud's modern theories and findings from scientific progress man revealed and was able to activate an animalistic and bestial part of his/her nature which had very close connections with the animalistic, decadent behaviour of the vampire. Apart from scientific progress, other themes of late Gothic fiction dealt with the moral and mental degradation of an individual in capitalistic society, which often resulted in sexual transgression and excess; threats of a 'New Woman' which arose from women's changing status and their acknowledgement of sexual desires; and fear of other cultures that was connected with Victorian Imperialism towards Eastern countries.

In addition to realistic and sensation novels, a mode of ghost story sparked another tradition of Gothic fiction that gained the most attention and popularity later in the early twentieth century. In creating a ghost story, authors tried primarily to articulate their scepticism toward the empirically organised system of Victorian society and domesticity. Their main motives were to point out peoples' fear of social dissociation, which was closely connected with the disruption of continuity with the past. As Botting testifies:

What is missing, in a thoroughly secular, rationalised and scientifically-ordered material world, the ghost story suggests, is a sense of unity, value and spirit. Ghosts returning from a greater darkness surrounding the culture, as much as the fascination with criminality and social disintegration, signalled this sense of loss.¹⁷

In other words, by employing spectral figures from a supernatural world, the authors warned of the consequences caused by destroying the old system of beliefs, which was evident in the spiritual vagueness and aimlessness of the contemporary society. The unexplained appearances of ghosts, though unnatural,

¹⁷ Botting, *Gothic* 127.

happened in tandem with reality and presented thus an uncanny atmosphere that threatened characters in immediate proximity.¹⁸

1.1.4 Gothic Fiction in the Twentieth Century and Postmodernism

The form of the realistic novel presented a viable opening for the interpretation of the complexity of peoples' life throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, however, it proved to be insufficient in the face of the coming paradigm shifts of the twentieth century. The framework of beliefs, values, and rules of the old world started crumbling, leaving people lost and confused about the reality of life and its purpose and sense. With the loss of credibility in the modern meta-narrative, people lacked guidance and control over their lives and clear definitions for judgment, value, and morality. In order to express the fact that each individual has a unique as well as limited perception of the same situation, many writers such as Virginia Woolf and T. S. Elliot started experimenting with the form of the novel by means that were often very complicated and tricky. However, as Peck and Coyle claim, "they [novels] became less difficult if we see that the difficulty simply enacts the problems the artist is having in making sense of the world."¹⁹ To describe the intricacies of life, which were seen through the differing and limited views of single individuals, these writers had to replace conventional techniques for constructing narratives with more suitable innovations such as stream of consciousness, fragmented sentences, and the absent narrator. "Gothic writing," as Punter points out, "is not realistic writing."²⁰

¹⁸ Concerning the mid-nineteenth century, it is essential to observe the development of the American novel which, among others, gave birth to a new and unconventional Gothic fiction. Without the burden of European history, American Gothic writers applied new themes, styles and devices through which they portrayed peoples' fears and potential threats rising up from the exploration of and settling down in the wild land of the New World, and the subsequent foundation and organisation of the young society. As Botting notes: "Gothic psychology and question narratives raise of the reality of strange incidents are framed with different issues: of rationalism, democracy, and religious organisation, and their relationship to individual freedom and social control." (Botting,114) In other words, as there was no dark and mysterious American past, Gothic authors such as Hawthorne and Poe drew inspiration instead from shadows, taboos, and small hidden secrets closely related to the realities of communal and family life. Throughout the nineteenth century the genres and modes of American literature developed significantly and in the following century it was even more adventurous and experimental in form than the European one.

¹⁹ Peck and Coyle, *The Literary terms and Criticism* 7.

²⁰ Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic* 119.

Therefore, in the increasingly blurred reality of contemporary novels, traces of the influence of Gothic devices can be found ubiquitously, even if only marginally. In other words, as Botting notes, “In the twentieth century Gothic is everywhere and nowhere.”²¹ As Gothic writings always dealt with social anxieties and taboos, their fragments could be seen in many crucial novels of that time, for instance, Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925), Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980), and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). Nevertheless, these fears possessed a different nature in accordance with the issues of the contemporary world such as the threat of disruption of the boundaries between inner being, social values, and concrete reality, threats of living in a dehumanised environment, and fear of cultural, familial, and individual fragmentation.²² Apart from these more representative contemporary novels, Gothic devices were dispersed among numerous other genres such as ghost story, horror, occult, and science fiction. In addition, Gothic writings were maintained by various other media, primarily film.²³ In these ways the core of Gothic writings remained present just under the surface of mainstream society even though, as a legitimate literary stream, it had long been absorbed into larger currents.

²¹ Botting, *Gothic* 155.

²² see Botting, *Gothic* 156.

²³ America’s Universal Studios, for example, resurrected classic Gothic novels in the 1930s by filming *Frankenstein*, and Britain’s Hammer Studios later reprised the film with a new adaptation in the 1950s, which set a new direction for further horror films such as Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.

1.2 Historical Context of Gothic Fiction

Before exploring the dark and gloomy recesses of Gothic spaces and the reason for their employment in Gothic fiction, it is important to explain the historical background that gave this 'genre' an opportunity to arise. The popularity of the phenomena of Gothic fiction flourished mainly in the last decades of the eighteenth century, however, its echoes can be seen in literature up to the present time. Despite being disdained by the official public it always presented a challenge to main literary streams. It not only stood apart but furtively influenced and shaped the works of more conventional writers of the day.

1.2.1 Rise in Popularity of Gothic Fiction

Consumption and production of the genre of Gothic fiction had significantly risen in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Ann Radcliffe, Horatio Walpole, and Matthew Lewis were undoubtedly the most successful protagonists of the genre whose new unconventional style and popularity attracted the attention of readers as well as a great number of imitators. The market was glutted with writings that copied plots, characters and, as Botting notes, even "the narrative techniques" and "parts of the titles" from the popular writers.²⁴ Even though there was mass enthusiasm for Gothic fiction, it did not correspond with the official literary critique. Despite the fact that Radcliffe and Walpole were mostly praised for literary taste and, as Punter writes, for using "a complex web of classical and Shakespearean allusions,"²⁵ the majority of books around the turn of the eighteenth century were regarded as a lesser fiction and they hardly resemble the style of the former.

The vast majority of these writings were blamed for being stereotypical in style (ornateness, hyperbole, violent exclamation), settings (old castles, ruins, convents), and repetitive in key elements (ghosts, mysterious monks and nuns, evil villains).²⁶ Apart from that, the authors were often accused of being mere

²⁴ Botting, *Gothic* 63.

²⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 23.

²⁶ see Punter, *Literature of Terror* 9.

sensationalists who wanted to satisfy the reader's desire for excitement, which they easily achieved by the extreme portrayal of terrifying situations. The critics of that time strongly disapproved of such violent techniques and denounced them as a primitive way of awaking terror in a reader. Furthermore, the eighteenth century was the era of the Enlightenment in the countries of Western Europe and reason represented the prime authority by which the entire intellectual, scientific, and cultural life was measured. Order, simplicity, and purity represented a universal pattern to be followed. Therefore, phenomena of Gothic fiction such as the unexplained supernatural, superstitious imagination, or magical worlds based on myths and legends seemed to turn people away from the proper way in which one should have been brought up to become an informed and educated individual. As for Gothic fiction, David Botting suggests that:

Through its presentations of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents, imagined or not, Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developing a rational or properly cultivated response. Exciting rather than informing, it chilled their blood, delighted their superstitious fancies and fed uncultivated appetites for marvellous and strange events, instead of instructing readers with moral lessons that inculcated decent and tasteful attitudes to literature and life.²⁷

In other words, by encountering mysterious monks, nuns, criminals, and villains, the books could stimulate superstitious imaginations in a reader, lead him/her to an inability to distinguish between fact and fiction, and spoil his/her taste for literature. Gothic fiction was also believed to support subversive threats to social and moral order. The gloomy and terrifying atmosphere of Gothic spaces, breathtaking mountainous landscapes, or fully explicit evil such as corruption, murder or torture could deluge a reader with an excess of emotions and passions and encourage him to step out of the line of proper behaviour.

Even though the majority of the critics and writers were not fond of this new dark and mysterious fashion wave in literature and considered it to be a waste of time, several of them saw the coming trend from a different point of view. There were a lot of crucial texts especially in the middle of the eighteenth century

²⁷ Botting, *Gothic* 4.

that emphasised the value of the Gothic elements and placed them in antithesis to those of the enlightened and civilised world. As Fred Botting explains:

Gothic was the archaic, the pagan, that which was prior to, or was opposed to, or resisted the establishment of civilised values and a well-regulated society. And various writers, starting from this point, began to make out a case for the importance of these Gothic qualities and to claim, specifically, that the fruits of primitivism and barbarism, possessed a fire, a vigour, a sense of grandeur which was sorely needed in English culture.²⁸

In comparison with generally accepted neo-classical texts, many outstanding writers, critics as well as thinkers, praised the Gothic for its connection with nature, feelings and imagination which were desperately missing in the former. Moreover, several critics even tried to justify the effect that the certain Gothic texts had upon the reader. The feelings of terror aroused in one's mind were claimed to be positive in the way they could move the reader to overcome superstitious fears and imaginations and renew his/her sense of self and social value. In other words, only by encountering the dark, gloomy and haunted world of the Gothic could the reader appreciate the light and ordered atmosphere of the Enlightenment and affirm the validity and virtues of conventional eighteenth century values.²⁹

Having studied the eighteenth century critiques, it is obvious that the nature of the cheap mass fiction with Gothic motives was generally denounced, even though perception of the term Gothic was rather ambivalent. It had a lot of different meanings and connections and, as Victor Sage adds, "many shades and combinations of associations."³⁰ This uncertain approach to the Gothic texts reflected the chaotic years of the 1790s that were affected for instance by fundamental changes in society, urbanisation, a threat of political revolution, and the lack of religious framework. As regards the society, *The Cambridge Historical Encyclopedia of Great Britain and Ireland* notes that "perhaps more significant change was to be seen in the middling ranks of society, which expanded in

²⁸ Botting, *Gothic* 5.

²⁹ see Botting, *Gothic* 70.

³⁰ Sage, *The Gothic Novel* 8.

numbers, diversified in composition and grew in both wealth and sophistication.”³¹ No longer were books a privilege of the exclusive aristocratic circles as they were a century before. The growth of the middle class caused development of a new reading public that varied in structure as well as gender. Both men and women were given access to the various books that they could borrow in circulating libraries or obtain easier due to a cheaper printing press. Apart from readers, the bourgeoisie also produced writers in their own circles who published books corresponding with a demand of contemporary market.

Even though the middle class was fond of reading realistic novels, it however started to incline towards Gothic fiction in 1790s. As David Punter points out, there was “a contradiction between official culture and actual taste.”³² Grounds for the shift can be seen mainly in the inability of the Enlightenment to answer people’s questions about everyday life. As reason was considered to be the only source of knowledge and truthful guide through a person’s life, belief in phenomena such as the supernatural, intuition, and even God’s leading was thus seen as an anachronism. Francois Bousquet indicates that thinkers at that time believed that “religion was linked to the world of fear and superstition” and should be replaced by the “transparency of the enlightened conscience.”³³ Though the Enlightenment brought up educated individuals who believed in their infinite power, it did so only at the cost of exclusion of human feelings, connection with traditions and continuity with history. As David Punter testifies:

Although the removal or the distancing of the divine and the insistence on human knowledge can be seen as progressive, the reduction of human to the rational can also be seen as circular and sterile ... Reliance on reason may appear to remove mystery, but only at the expense of outlawing large expanses of actual experience, the experience of the emotions, the passions.³⁴

³¹ Christopher Haigh, *The Cambridge Historical Encyclopedia of Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Christopher Haigh (Cambridge: CUP, 1985) 232.

³² Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 23.

³³ Francois Bousquet, “The Enlightenment Foundation of Modern Europe,” *International Review of Mission*, 95 (2006): 237-246. EBSCO. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.ebsco.com>>.

³⁴ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 24.

Punter's comment suggests that in being faithful to the model of Enlightenment values the eighteenth century man was forced to suppress his conflicting feelings or beliefs and make his fears taboo, which was a rather impossible task in the changing world of the 1790s. Therefore, people's efforts to seek asylum in Gothic writings, which fully contradicted the Enlightenment by means of supernatural, emotional, mental and social excess and transgression, only emphasised the shortages of social order at that time. Liking Gothic writings did not necessarily mean that a reader was a revolutionary who wanted to oppose and reject the values of the Enlightenment but that he rather seemed to be searching for a balance between the new progressive and rational understanding of the world and continuity with the thoughts of the more conservative past.

The Gothic fiction provided a world in which "good depended on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits...Transgression, provoking fears of social disintegration, thus enabled the reconstruction of limits and boundaries."³⁵ Botting's comment suggests that the good qualities of a human being cannot be separated from the dark and evil ones; they have to exist at the same time. In other words, by omitting the means of terror that caused feelings of fear and superstition, one was not necessarily able to reach a proper rational and moral resolution.

Though the antithesis of good and evil in Gothic could have had a good effect on a reader, the books were still seen as rather subversive and dangerous. The explanation may lie in the ambivalence of a reader's feelings while being exposed to objects of terror and horror. A reader was supposed to be frightened and then discouraged by the dark threats of the Gothic, however, it often happened that he/she was rather pleasantly thrilled and fascinated by them. In imagining the sublimity of foreign mountainous landscapes occupied by bandits or haunted medieval ruins a reader was encouraged to loosen his bonds with reality and employ fantasy. As Botting suggests, "while it [Gothic fiction] freed the writer from neoclassical conventions, it also imaginarily liberated the reader from his or her place in society."³⁶ This ambivalence contrasted a single meaning desired by

³⁵ Botting, *Gothic* 9.

³⁶ Botting, *Gothic* 46.

the Enlightenment and thus represented a social and domestic threat for those who found an interest in Gothic fiction.

1.2.2 Gothic Fiction in the 19th and 20th Century

Gothic fiction as presented above did not have a long duration. The form and content of early writings based on “medieval romances, supernatural, Faustian and fairy tales, Renaissance drama, sentimental, picaresque and confessional narratives, as well as the ruins, tombs and nocturnal speculations”³⁷ were not able to build much tradition and continuity. Although it was a leading ‘genre’ in the 1790s, it remained a rather marginal literary stream and almost disappeared within a half century. However, the influence of Gothic fiction could be seen in literature up to the present time. The permanent change in an image of the world has urged people to reassess their lives and values and cope with the new coming order. This process has been always connected with feelings of confusion, alienation, and fear. For that reason, Gothic fiction remains a place in which a reader can find understanding and shelter.

As for the nineteenth century, the authors of Gothic texts still drew from the works of Radcliffe, Walpole, and Lewis, however, the themes and a style had changed. According to David Punter, “The coming of industry, the move toward the city, the regulation of patterns of labour in the late eighteenth century, set up the world in which older, ‘natural’ ways of governing the individual life – the seasons, the weather, simple laws of exchange – become increasingly irrelevant.”³⁸ Themes thus rather reflected the increasing urbanisation, scientific progress, and technological innovations of that time. Craggy mountainous landscapes were replaced by the labyrinths of the modern commercial city, whose streets and homes were inhabited by scientists, fathers, husbands, criminals, and madmen who struggled with psychological rather than supernatural forces. The individual had not only to be aware of outside dangers but he/she could not be sure of himself/herself either. As Botting emphasises, one had to tame “the bestial within the

³⁷ Botting, *Gothic* 15.

³⁸ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 112.

human.”³⁹ In the early Gothic fiction there was a clear distinction between good and bad characters and hardly any writer dared to overstep this official Enlightenment cliché. Nevertheless, the boundary started to blur with the commencement of Romanticism. Being permanently confronted by oppression from the monarchical tyranny and its unreliable and corrupted institutions, English Gothic writers at the turn of the century did not hesitate to show their frank sympathy with a villain who stood at the edge of society. His doubts, consciousness and longing for freedom became even an object of sympathy rather than condemnation. This shift became obvious in Gothic fiction during the time of Realism, in which individuals were already depicted as “divided products of both reason and desire.”⁴⁰ Botting’s comment testifies that Gothic writers no longer tried to hide people’s alienation from the official doctrine of Realism and its materialistic and scientific world. The villain candidly reflected people’s inability to be self-disciplined and behave rationally all the time. It revealed the common people’s ill motivation and their degradation within society.

Concerning the second half of the nineteenth century and twentieth century, Gothic fiction, as Sage claims, was not “a dusty corner but an arena open, from the first, to the social and political interests of the date.”⁴¹ Despite being dispersed among various different genres such as the adventure novel, modernist literature, romantic fiction and popular horror, Gothic themes still reappeared and referred to issues, shortages and problems of that time.⁴² In a world where people were caught in the labyrinths of a decaying society, one could easily start to become sceptical about the validity and meaning of that world’s values and doubt if there was an exit from all the fears and terror.

³⁹ Botting, *Gothic* 12.

⁴⁰ Botting, *Gothic* 12.

⁴¹ Sage, *The Gothic Novel* 8.

⁴² see Botting, *The Gothic* 13.

1.3 Female Gothic Literature

As there will be disquisition about three female writers and their work in the following chapters, it is essential to mention the contribution of women to the 'genre' of Gothic fiction. Punter claims that "It is now becoming a critical common place that one of the important features of Gothic is that it was in its inception a 'women's fiction', written by and for women."⁴³ In other words, for a certain reason, women chose, among various other genres, to express their feelings and thoughts via this controversial mode. In order to explain this phenomenon, it is important to understand women's social status in the eighteenth century and the changes it has undergone to the present time. As for the social hierarchy in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, women were supposed to obey and follow the values and rules that were set primarily by men. In such a patriarchal society there were clear boundaries between what men and women were created for and what their place and purpose was within society. The aesthetic ideal for a woman/wife was characterised by an image called 'angel in the house'. Women were expected to be submissive and devoted to their husbands, cultivating virtues such as purity, modesty, gracefulness, charm, and self-sacrifice, and they were often fully excluded from cultural and political life on the belief that they were not both physiologically or sociologically competent in and designed for these fields of study.⁴⁴ As for literary power, it was not a matter attributed to women either. They should have attended to breeding, dancing and fashion, but not art. Gilbert and Gubar note that in the nineteenth century thinkers' opinion about women's creativity, "writing, reading, and thinking are not only alien but also inimical to 'female' characteristics ... Literature is not a business of woman's life, and it cannot be."⁴⁵ When women were actually allowed to produce literature, it usually involved only children's books, letters, diaries and fiction of lesser quality, otherwise they were accused of madness from a mental

⁴³ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic* 191.

⁴⁴ see William Thackeray, *The Angel in the House* 20 March 2011 <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html>

⁴⁵ Sandra M. Gilbert, Sausan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 8.

illness. No women were believed capable of producing serious works of fiction, therefore, those who made such attempts usually used pseudonyms or found shelter in various alternative sub-genres which were not dominated by men. For this reason, the 'genre' of Gothic fiction served as an ideal means for women who desired to express their life's experience and perspective but at the same time wanted to conceal it in the view of the general public. As Gilbert and Gubar testify:

women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning. Thus these authors managed difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.⁴⁶

As Gilbert and Gubar's quotation suggest, Gothic fiction enabled women to communicate their controversial story within the generally approved content and also helped female authors to confront their typical fears and taboos concerning, for instance, sexual stereotyping, subdued passions and desires, virginity, and child birth. Nevertheless, female writing never escaped criticism and refusal and was often denounced for addling women's heads and being subversive to manners and values of the proper domestic order. However, in Gothic fiction women managed to lay foundation of their independent literary tradition on which their successors built up to the present time.

⁴⁶ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 73.

1.4 Conclusion

Concerning the generic context of Gothic fiction, it was conceived in the mid-eighteenth century as a unique literary form that reflected the changes in cultural and social life of that time. Flourishing alongside and blending with the bourgeois realistic novel, it often drew its inspiration from past aristocratic forms such as tragedy and also popular forms like medieval romance and ballad. Instead of providing exact historical accounts or depicting truthful pictures of people's lives that never strayed from the limits of proper social behaviour, Gothic fiction told rather fragmented stories draped in shadow and mystery, plunging their characters into terrifying and confusing incidents. Unlike realistic novels, Gothic fiction often operated on psychological level dealing with people's thoughts, fears, and feelings. Since the form and narrative techniques of the realistic novel were not able to cope fully with the visceral and oftentimes inexpressible sides of people's identities, the Gothic authors often had to search for alternative means of articulation. They often employed, for instance, the language of symbolism and metaphor that better suited their purposes. Therefore, tying together different literary traditions, original Gothic fiction seem to vary between prose and poetry, telling its own world's history through alternative modes and genres.⁴⁷ Apart from the early novels of terror in the 1790s, though, Gothic fiction was not able to build a considerable literary tradition. Simply stated, its original form, as derived from Radcliffe, Walpole, and Lewis, virtually disappeared in the middle of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, its influence on the literary world can be observed up to the present time. As Botting explains, "The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periodic distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing."⁴⁸ Gothic fiction thus diffused into different genres or elected to imitate them. After more than 200 years, readers can still encounter texts that were either explicitly inspired by traditional Gothic fiction or used Gothic devices and subjects in more tenuous

⁴⁷ see Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic* 182-189.

⁴⁸ Botting, *Gothic* 14.

ways in order to not only terrify readers but also provide them an opportunity to articulate and cope with the taboos and anxieties of their time.

As for Gothic fiction from the view of historical context, its appearance was closely bound with the emergence of the middle class within the structure of society, which also had a profound impact on literary production and consumption. Even though bourgeoisie life was inherently connected with the genre of a novel, at the same time it shifted its preferences towards sensational Gothic fiction. This anti-pole proved the fact that Gothic fiction, even though seen as less 'real', was also able to present truth and, moreover, serve as storage of people's memory and history, but of a different kind.⁴⁹ The second half of the eighteenth century was stigmatised by profound changes in every area of people's life. Individuals had to cope with the coming age of industrialisation, urbanisation, uniformity, capitalism with conflict in the interest of the individual and society, and new kinds of work and social roles, which often left them unable to determine their place and purpose within society. Those shifts were accompanied by phenomena like paranoia, taboo, and the barbaric, which also became a matrix and core of Gothic fiction. In other words, unlike the writers of the realistic novel, Gothic authors were concerned with the reverse and darker accounts of realism and often inspected people's life on a psychological level of their minds. However, since the 1790s the 'genre' of Gothic fiction developed into a rather stereotypical form which was not able to keep up with the changing image of the world. With the arrival of the second half of the nineteenth century Gothic novel/romance was losing its vogue and relevance--if not largely dispersed among different genres and modes--and almost disappeared. Nevertheless, there are either apparent or shadowy influences of Gothic fiction in works of literature up to the present time. Gothic themes, devices, and approach to narrative still serve authors as a valid and contemporary means of expression while coping with yet a more complex, complicated and uneasy world.

⁴⁹ see Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic* 182-189.

2 GOTHIC SPACES

A medieval castle with hidden passages and secret chambers, ruins, dungeons, labyrinths, convents, mountainous landscapes, caves, and dark woods used to be a conventional setting of Gothic fiction. Harbouring dark dangers, the Gothic spaces were meant to thrill a reader's mind and keep him/her intrigued in reading. However, Gothic settings had not only physical meaning but often contained deeper symbolism. The shadows of the castle, cave, or graveyard could conceal menace that reflected various cultural anxieties and taboos of the time. Gothic architecture thus could have represented uncertainty and fears in political, social and cultural spheres.

2.1 Popular Gothic spaces in the 18th century

As was introduced in the preceding chapter, the last decades of the eighteenth century in England were marked by political, social, and cultural changes. As for politics, the countries of Western Europe fearfully awaited the results and consequences of the French Revolution that sought to depose the current absolute monarchy and establish a new order. Therefore, all forms of political radicalism were guarded and culprits who were proved to be guilty strictly punished. Concerning books, they were considered to be a powerful tool of spreading revolutionary thought among the general public. For this reason they were subjected to political censure and writers who did not want to be accused of radicalism or blasphemy had to watch the content of their writings. The character of the books also reflected a vast change in the structure of society at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There was a noticeable rise in the number of bourgeoisies who did not hesitate to openly criticize and condemn the past feudal system and its oppressive practices via literature. Furthermore, there was a shift in the perception of women's social status that was, however, seen rather with apprehension and disapproval. The 1790s onward were marked by female emancipation, and women both read and wrote their own books that incorporated the experiences and fears of living in a pure masculine world. As Botting testifies, "One of the main objects of anxieties was the 'New Woman' who, in her demand for economic, sexual, and political independence, was seen as a threat to

conventionally sexualised division between domestic and social roles.”⁵⁰ Concerning religion, the writer often used, for instance, anti-Catholic themes so that they matched the prejudices of Protestant English readers. To sum up, there were many contradictory social and political factors shaping the image of the world of the late eighteenth century England and that caused feelings of uncertainty toward values, beliefs, and the future. Literature thus presented an arena in which writers could either openly or secretly express their opinions, fears and doubts. As for Gothic fiction, it was an illustrious example. Botting suggests, “The Gothic figures that appeared in so many novels, as well as critical, aesthetic and political discussions, became signs of a pervasive cultural anxiety concerning the relation between of present and past, and the relationship between classes, sexes and individuals within society.”⁵¹ Gothic architecture undoubtedly personified a great number of the figures about which Botting is writing. The following paragraph thus deals with Gothic spaces, such as mountainous landscapes, castles, ruins, convents, and caves, which were typical for literature of terror at the turn of the century.

2.1.1 Mountainous landscape in the southern European countries

The stories of early Gothic writers such as Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis, and Ann Radcliffe were usually set in the past in the southern European countries. Employing the atmospheres of the specific Italian, French and Spanish countryside served several purposes. As observed in the preceding paragraph, the last decades of the eighteenth century in England were heavily influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment order, as well as by political unrest, and social and cultural changes. Literature that did not follow the pattern of the Enlightenment aesthetic and purpose or that might have incorporated revolutionary and subversive hints was officially censored. In order to avoid criticism and obtain greater literary freedom, the Gothic authors wisely chose environments that were remote from the disturbing events in England at that time. On the other hand, the fact that the plot of the books was set in the distant periods and locations gave the writers a certain freedom to step over general literary stereotypes and allowed

⁵⁰ Botting, *Gothic* 138.

⁵¹ Botting, *Gothic* 89.

them to comment on the current important public issues. Punter testifies to both these features of Gothic fiction at the turn of the century:

The 1790s were chaotic years in which domestic unrest and fears of invasion from abroad shaped political and cultural life, and the literary market was flooded with a mass of fiction which rejected direct engagement with the activities of contemporary life in favour of geographically and historically remote actions and settings; but these two facts must be positively connected... Within the Gothic we can find a very intense, if displaced, engagement with political and social problems, the difficulty with negotiating those problems being precisely reflected in the Gothic's central stylistic conventions.⁵²

Moreover, not only writers were freed from the eighteenth century conventions and proprieties. Encountering the imagined worlds of Gothic fiction, the reader's mind was liberated to wander through a landscape of the foreign country and he/she could marvel at its grandeur and sublime. Gothic fiction thus gave readers, especially women, an opportunity to abstractly escape from the fetters of domestic life and forget for a moment the strict demands and expectations of eighteenth century society. In addition, the landscape often represented the only retreat where the persecuted characters of Gothic fiction could find consolation. The same was valid for the reader. Gothic fiction could become the only refuge that provided the individual with the comfort which he/she lacked in the uncertainty of the outside world.

The critics were rather sceptical about the ambivalent usage of Gothic settings. An image of Gothic nature evoked diametrically opposite qualities than those valued by the Enlightenment. Beauty and delicacy were replaced by feelings such as awe, terror, and the supernatural. Furthermore, it was believed that, in imagining mountainous scenery, for example, the Italian Alps elevated the reader's mind and soul and even filled him/her with the sense of infinity and divine power. The ability of an object to cause feelings of the Gothic quality was assigned to the sublime, the term that was discussed among writers and critics of that time and often led to antagonistic opinions. According to Edmund Burke:

⁵² Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 54.

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it.⁵³

Burke's comment testifies that the sublime initiated the kind of excessive emotions such as astonishment that were difficult to command and that could easily get out of a reader's control. Having caused terror or even horror in an individual, the sublime blinded the reader's reason and led him/her to his/her superstitious imaginations. Botting implies that Burke even used this term to condemn the French revolution when he called it as "a darkly sublime threat in contrast to the gently enlightened tones of English social and political stability."⁵⁴ For this reason, the literature that took advantage of the abilities of the sublime to evoke such powerful responses in a reader could be denounced as undesirable and even subversive. Regardless, the sublime technique was plentifully used by the Gothic writers with approval by and to the satisfaction of the general readership, and became the most popular genre of the 1790s.

2.1.2 The gothic castle and medieval ruins

The setting of the Gothic castle or among medieval ruins presented another typical feature that distinguished the genre of Gothic fiction. The sublime form of their architecture aroused feelings of astonishment that pervaded the mind, and the shadows of dark halls, chambers, and vaults turned readers' lives into a nightmare. The usage as well as the perception of the phenomena of the Gothic castle was again ambivalent. On the one hand the Gothic was connected with everything that was barbarous, Catholic, and feudal in origin, but on the other it was assumed to be civilised, protestant, and democratic.⁵⁵ Partly in an effort to distance themselves from the past and its forms of power, Gothic writers were fond of using the image of the castle as a symbol of the enlightened victory over the

⁵³ Edmund Burke. *Of the Sublime. The Gothic Novel*, ed. Victor Sage (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990) 33.

⁵⁴ Botting, *Gothic* 86.

⁵⁵ see Sage, *The Gothic Novel* 17.

barbarous and medieval past. The ruins of the castle thus stood for the development of the world and its values. As Tompkins quotes Thomson in *The Gothic Romance*, “the ruins of a castle demonstrate the stability of the government, the progress of civilisation, the security of property and the safety of the subject.”⁵⁶In other words, the temporal and spatial dissociation with the past enabled eighteenth century society to define its own identity and place in the course of history. However, this progress is also inevitably connected with a certain loss, in that the haunted castle stood for human qualities that disappeared irretrievably upon the arrival of the new era. The values of the medieval aristocratic past such as chivalry, honour and sense for adventure had to retreat from the ambitions of selfish individualism and the patriarchal order of the eighteenth century. People looked with nostalgia to Gothic architecture as a landmark of older traditions and continuity with the past. The different associations recalled by the image of the medieval castle only underscored the ambivalence of the Gothic genre.

On the one hand Gothic spaces represented a separation from the past, but on the other they were used as a place for projecting people’s fears and anxieties at the time. After having escaped the dangers of the outside world, the heroines of Gothic fiction, often aristocratic in their origin, returned back into the domestic safety of the castle. Having been educated by the corrupt and violent nature of the surrounding environment, they should have appreciated the advantages of the family life and its values. However, soon the heroines became aware of the fact that home was turning into a threatening prison rather than a shelter. There were secret chambers situated in the decaying parts of the castle in which a horrifying family secret was waiting as a dark menace to be discovered. The sins of the fathers then started haunting the powerless heroines with the same force as the supernatural threats of the outside world before. There can be found a parallel with eighteenth century life which only emphasised the ability of Gothic fiction to blur boundaries between past and present. Having finished reading, and having

⁵⁶ Joyce Tompkin. *The Gothic Romance. The Gothic Novel*, ed. Victor Sage (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.,1990) 87.

experienced chilling adventures and threatening supernatural events, readers, especially women, were supposed to come back to the life of the eighteenth century and appreciate its values. They were expected to recognise the goodness of the patriarchal order and set social hierarchy which showed them their proper position within society and family. However, it often happened that the reader conversely perceived the adventures of the imagined world as a welcome escape. Disillusioned with the strong and hypocritical system of eighteenth century values, he/she had opportunity to experience a missing freedom that Gothic fiction offered. The possibility of employing one's imagination in such a way presented a potential threat to the rules of the set social order. The authors were accused of spurring the reader to transgress the domestic and even sexual standards at that time, thus and Gothic fiction was subordinated to strict censoring.

2.1.3 The institutions of the Catholic Church

As Clery points out, "Whereas the classical heritage united Western Europe in the eighteenth century, religious difference led to alienation and antagonism, and Italy was in this respect regarded by Protestant nations as the epicentre of spiritual corruption."⁵⁷ As Clery's comment suggests, by supporting the Catholic Church countries such as France and Spain were seen as a common enemy for those of northern Europe. Protestant states perceived the Catholic Church as archaic and tyrannical and they declared its practices as being hypocritical and insincere. This general attitude toward the Catholic Church thus perfectly served the eighteenth century writers who gladly used the institution's image to reify the idea of Evil and the descent of values. The Gothic authors were no exception. The heroes of Gothic fiction were often imprisoned behind the impervious walls of the monasteries and convents in which they suffered torment and anguish from the hands of venal monks and malicious nuns. If an individual happened to be lost in the labyrinths of the Inquisition, there remained only a negligible prospect for him/her to see the light of the day and experience freedom again. Captive in complete isolation within its dark vaults, one was dead to the outer world and external life. Even though the Gothic writers did not hesitate to depict the Catholic Church in such wicked ways, they did so only to the extent to which its institutions failed to fulfil their entrusted purpose

⁵⁷ E.J. Clery, 'Introduction' to *The Italian* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

and mission. Whenever it was acting hypocritically, treating people on the basis of convention or lack of communication, it became a heinous evil that was connected with medieval barbarity and the oppressive politics of the feudal past. Otherwise, the authors presented the Catholic institutions, especially convents, in a more favourable light. Moreover, the labyrinthine net of the Inquisition's underground often evoked different projections in readers' minds. The critics and thinkers of the eighteenth century often used the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for seditious literature and politics. As Botting explains:

Labyrinths, as places of radical politics and confusion, are identified as dangerous, subversive sites destroying established boundaries and conventions. Linked to novel that raise contaminating spectre of democracy and excite readers with a 'Gallic frenzy' that simultaneously upsets proper national and sexual identifications, the labyrinth is also associated with confusion, deception and superstitious corruption.⁵⁸

In other words, there existed a common fear resulting from the restless events in France at that time. Revolutionary mobs threatened to undermine the hegemony of the French King and all the subversive plots were believed to originate from the ranks of secret confederacies of radical philosophers and rebels who intrigued dark plans apart from the laws of the outside world. Therefore, the works of Gothic fiction that often employed images of the mysterious Inquisition were accepted rather cautiously.

2.2 Spaces in the 19th and 20th century Gothic literature

During the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, literature known as Gothic was losing its popularity and influence and if it did not fully disappear, it was pulled into the dark likeness of Romanticism. In terms of its settings, the locus did not change but rather what changed was the interpretation of the settings. Wild natural landscapes scattered with the ruins of castles, which in the 1790s frightened the reader with their sublime power, shifted their meaning and represented, for instance, a loss of continuity with the past and its values or the individual's mental and emotional struggle with his/her inner and obscure passions. Such close connections between rough and stormy natural scenes and

⁵⁸ Botting, *Gothic* 83.

the individual's temperament and inner forces could be seen, for example, in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). However, as Botting points out, "The extravagant effects of Gothic and Romantic elements tended, in the nineteenth century fiction, to be refracted through the domestic world central to Realism."⁵⁹ In other words, early Gothic and also Romantic themes, forms, devices, and techniques were almost utterly exploited till the second half of the nineteenth century, and the Gothic world with its aristocratic and Catholic architecture and rugged and untameable landscapes neither brought feelings of excitement and terror to the contemporary reader nor was able to provide him/her a satisfactory means of identification. The utterly bourgeois society thus searched for different modes of writing which would have reached people's lives in the immediate closeness of their everyday reality, and embraced changes taking place across the nineteenth century such as urbanisation, industrial progress, technical innovations and scientific discoveries and inventions. The writers retired to the genre of novel which best challenged the demands and needs of the contemporary public. Regarding Gothic fiction, it either incorporated elements of Realism or dispersed among different genres and modes of writings with more realistic settings. Thus the Gothic terrors moved their locus as well as originator. A deep forest was replaced by the labyrinthine net of the city streets; the dark and remote castle was substituted with the uncanny closeness of one's home; and supernatural figures lost their spectral appearance while taking the form of aberrant individuals, doubles, criminals, and even fathers. Within the early years of the twentieth century there was a huge revival of the early Gothic novels in the cinema. Apart from that, traces of Gothic fiction continued to disperse among various popular genres and media. Moreover, Gothic horror not only affected people as a sinister shadow of the past or disturbing uncanny presence, but it also reached the human race from the distant future. In such cases the plot of the novel often soared beyond the Earth's surface to explore the fantastic worlds of the universe.

One of the perpetual themes of Gothic fiction, appearing again and again in this 'genre' from its inception, was the struggle of the individual either against society and its order or his/her inner passions and untameable temperament.

⁵⁹ Botting, *Gothic* 128.

Therefore, it is not surprising that during the course of the nineteenth century a group which took quite readily to this unconventional 'genre' was women. As Judith E. Fleenor remarks, "The Gothic world is one of nightmare, and that nightmare is created by the individual in conflict with the values of her society and her prescribed role."⁶⁰ In other words, the Gothic world represented women's profound dissatisfaction with the results of the forming process of modern society, which was not able to assure them enough economic, legal, and personal security. In such a world created by and for men, they had to succumb to unequal treatment, which made their hopes for self-development and self-actualisation hardly obtainable. Moreover, women not only suffered a shortage of liberties in a public sense, but they also experienced the same feelings of insecurity and fear within the walls of their own homes. The traditional domestic interior together with the protective patriarchal system--which should have afforded a shelter against the mechanisms of the outer world--became rather an oppressive and tyrannical prison.⁶¹ It thus follows that the true Gothic nightmare of the nineteenth century lurked outside as well as inside peoples' homes, which stirred up uncanny feelings and left individuals doubting the security of the family circle. In the sense of incarceration the bourgeoisie home represented for its inhabitants the same uncomfortable and threatening place as the castle a century before. As Punter and Byron observe:

The castle is a labyrinth, a maze, a site of secrets. It is also, paradoxically, a site of domesticity, where ordinary life carries on even while accompanied by the most extraordinary and inexplicable of events. It can be a place of womb-like security, a refuge from the complex exigencies of the outer world; it can also - at the same time, and according to a difference of perception - be a place of incarceration, a place where heroines and others can be locked away from the fickle memory of 'ordinary' life.⁶²

In the safety of the home, like in a Gothic castle, the individual could experience loneliness, anxiety and unexpected feelings of deep discomfort about self and the

⁶⁰ Juliann E. Fleenor, 'Introduction' to *The Female Gothic* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983) 10.

⁶¹ see Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) xxi.

⁶² David Punter, Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford : Blackwell, 2004) 261-262.

surrounding world, which led to excesses of sensitivity and a sudden inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Nevertheless, the Gothic horror of the nineteenth and twentieth century varied significantly in its source. In the preceding century, heroines were intimidated by the external sublime powers to which they were exposed after being forced to leave a home-loving security. On the contrary, nineteenth and twentieth century heroines encountered uncanny experiences right within the familiarity of their homes, where their mind was the main platform for all the disturbances, transgressions, and extravagance.

Under the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution, scientists raised the assumption that human nature is much closer to the wild and untamed animal kingdom than had been previously anticipated. Primitive and archaic forces, still dwelling in the human's mind, could thus present an incentive to one's disobedience to the norms and mores of ordered bourgeoisie society. In other words, the human mind was not yet considered stable or cleanly divided between good and evil, but it seemed to be more ambivalent with a tendency toward moral indifference. Such inconsistency raised questions about human identity, which definitely became one of the major themes of the Gothic fiction in the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Horror then usually took the likeness of one's split identity, which was pushed to the monstrous by scientific and technological experiments as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886). The setting of these Gothic novels still took place in the city, but its labyrinthine streets did not yet represent the horror itself. They only enabled atrocities mainly criminal and sexual in form, which arose as a by-product of the general world's progress.⁶³ As for female Gothic fiction at the turn of the century and on, it also dealt with crises of identity, which, turned to typical female matters such as problems of adolescence, loss of virginity, marriage, and childbirth. The locus of such terrors was usually closer to the places which were commonly appointed to women, such as home and its bedrooms. 38

⁶³ see Botting, *Gothic* 136-142.

2.3 Conclusion

To sum up, Gothic spaces remain inseparable from the traditional conventions of the 'genre' of Gothic fiction. Commencing with the decaying medieval castle and terminating on distant alien planets, they stimulated the imagination in readers' mind and filled it with horror and disgust as well as curiosity and excitement. Over the centuries Gothic writers applied different forms of architecture and landscapes to represent, for instance, a hiding place for the various fantastic, and later more realistic, dark menaces and taboos of social order, but also a soothing shelter against prosecution and oppression of innocent individuals. Moreover, they also stood as a symbol for the individual's physical, psychological, and emotional isolation within society. In order to rightly interpret the message enclosed in the Gothic spaces, it is necessary to conduct deeper survey and research, which would be done with respect to the historical and generic context of the 'genre,' as well as to the writer's unique personal experience.

3 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN *THE ITALIAN* BY ANN RADCLIFFE

Horatio Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* laid the foundations of a 'genre' which, in the view of late eighteenth century theorists, seemingly lacked purpose and, while revolving around romantic and supernatural incidents, only captivated and puzzled the reader with appealing techniques of narratives. Not knowing how to classify this new fashion in literature, these theorists decided--perhaps carelessly--to designate it with the label 'Gothic.' The term itself had not only a sporadically homogeneous interpretation but also, as contemporary critics of Gothic claim, created an inconsistent group whose works possessed dissimilar grounds and ambitions and were of incomparable quality.⁶⁴ For example, Lewis' *Monk* was widely known as promoting violence and a perverse appetite by depicting obscene and extravagant scenes which corrupted the minds of young readers and led them astray from proper Christian, social, and family morals. Moreover, his work was also believed to carry a revolutionary spirit from France which presented a cogent reason for the critics to feel anxious and apprehensive. It thus needs closer inspection to find out if Ann Radcliffe, who was regarded as the most popular and successful representative of the Gothic 'genre' in the unsettled years of the late eighteenth century, belonged to the writers who attempted to "confuse us and themselves in the labyrinths of politics," or if dark vaults, abandoned castles, and secret chambers possessed for readers a different message.⁶⁵

Regarding settings, Radcliffe did not defy a typical pattern of the Gothic 'genre' in the late eighteenth century and set the plots of her novels, like Walpole and Lewis, mainly in historical or more contemporary environs of France and Italy. This phenomenon resulted from several different reasons. First of all, as Clery claims, "at that time, knowledge of Latin, classical history and literature, and appreciation of classical art, were the essential attributes of the ruling class."⁶⁶ In

⁶⁴ see Clara F. McIntyre, "Were the 'Gothic Novels' Gothic?." *PMLA* 37 (1921): 664-667. *JSTOR* Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

⁶⁵ Botting, *Gothic* 80.

⁶⁶ E.J. Clery, 'Introduction', to *The Italian* xi-xx.

other words, due to successful imperial expansion, which brought Britain wealth and prosperity, as well as a subsequent primary position among European states, the English compared their worth with that of the glorious Roman Empire and declared the late eighteenth century as the new Augustinian age. Therefore, it is not surprising that Radcliffe's works reflect this general fondness and enthusiasm for classical art and draw from it as a rich source of inspiration. While depicting landscapes and social life in continental Europe she apparently relied on knowledge from available travel literature and strong imagination gleaned from dramatic plays, Italian opera and also contemporary art. Her scenes of the Italian Renaissance resembled a great deal, for instance, those found in Elizabethan drama, which comprised one of the most popular pastimes in the second half of the eighteenth century. Clara McIntyre testifies that "The rise of Gothic novel coincides, roughly, with a distinct revival of interest in Elizabethan drama. Both in published collections and on the stage, during the last half of the eighteenth century, the public had an opportunity to become acquainted with plays which had been little known for the years."⁶⁷ As McIntyre's quotation suggests, even though Mrs. Radcliffe never had a chance to visit Italy for herself, she could apparently rely on plentiful sources available at that time. As for *The Italian*, Mrs. Radcliffe drew her inspiration from Italian opera and art as she named the characters of the book after two well-known artists, Vivaldi and Rosalba Carriera, who both currently performed in Britain. Moreover, she set its plot entirely in the Italian region, exploring new towns and landscapes such as Naples, Rome, mountains of Garganus and the Adriatic shore, which only affirmed her interest in both historical and modern Italian cultural and social life and also its natural beauties.⁶⁸

Second, despite the fact that Britain possessed just as deep an admiration for the classical Italian heritage as for other European countries, it did not, on the contrary, share enthusiasm for the Catholic Church, which in the first half of the eighteenth century was still powerfully operating in Spain and France. By force of its structure, beginning with the Pope, who possessed unlimited power, to the prodigal and idle monks and nuns living in monasteries and convents, the

⁶⁷ McIntyre, "Were the "Gothic Novels" Gothic?" 664.

⁶⁸ see Clery, 'Introduction' to *The Italian* xi-xx.

machinery of the Catholic Church kept people obedient by means of idolatry, superstition, hypocritical confessionals and the power of the Inquisition. Such practices were seen as improper and inimical to the politics and economy of Protestant Britain and an autonomous Parliament, which, after the final defeat of the pro-Catholic Stuarts in 1745, promoted the principles of individual freedom and security of property. As anti-Catholic propaganda was omnipresent in Britain at that time, it would have been surprising if it did not affect the field of contemporary art and literature. As early Gothic authors often articulated the apprehensions and anxieties of institutions such as the family and the church, therefore, it could have seemed that they strongly opposed and fought against any hint of Catholic hypocrisy and superstition via their works. However, according to the twentieth critics, this would be too simplistic a point of view. Concerning Radcliffe, Clery argues that “she voices some prejudices, and exploits popular preconceptions about Catholicism from time to time to produce an instant atmosphere of enigma and foreboding ... But although Radcliffe invites such assumptions, she was by no means straightforward bigot.”⁶⁹ In other words, Radcliffe knew how to benefit from her readers’ prejudices towards the Catholic Church. She was able to arouse the desired effect of suspense and terror in a reader by indicating the crimes that may have happened behind the walls of the Catholic churches, monasteries and convents. The best example of this can be seen in the introduction to the plot of *The Italian*, when the English travellers visit the church of Santa Maria Del Pianto in Naples and ask a local friar about the extraordinary man they had spotted in the portico.

....one of the party pointed him out to the friar, and enquired who he was; the friar turning to look after him, did not immediately replied, but, on the question being repeated, he inclined his head, as in a kind of obeisance, and calmly replied, He is an assassin.’

‘An assassin!’ exclaimed one of the Englishmen; ‘an assassin and at liberty!’

An Italian gentleman, who was of the party, smiled at the astonishment of his friend.

‘He has sought sanctuary here, ‘replied the friar; ‘within these walls he may not be hurt.’ (2)

⁶⁹ Clery, Introduction, *The Italian* xi-xx.

*When the travellers learn about the criminal who was granted protection within the walls of the monastery despite his dark deeds, they remain astonished and bewildered. Such clichés concerning the lawless Catholic practises in Italian churches sprang mainly from popular travel books which were widely read by the general public in the first half of the eighteenth century. Radcliffe knew how to take advantage of these preconceptions and how to exploit them as a tool for seizing the readers' attention from the very beginning of the book. Nevertheless, by the time Radcliffe started writing *The Italian*, the fate of the Catholic Church in France and Italy was sealed by the Napoleonic wars, and the locus of threat and tyranny had changed its venue. Her occasional two-way treatment of the Catholic institutions, therefore, would prove to be both a more liberal and a more tolerant approach to Catholicism in general and also to the sense of fear connected with the coming changes in the new world order. The example can be seen in her benevolent treatment of the Catholic monasteries. Not only had she depicted them as malevolent and corrupted executors of evil acts, but if fulfilling their purpose, she presented them as a last sanctuary for those who were escaping injustice, violence and an oppressive patriarchy.⁷⁰ There are scenes in *The Italian* in which Ellena is compelled to stay in the convents of San Stefano and, later on, Santa Della Piéta. In San Stefano Ellena is subjected to the hands of cold and evil nuns who are acting on orders from the Marchesa di Vivaldi, who tries to thwart Ellena's wedding with Vivaldi, her son.*

... and she followed dejectedly, through the silent passages to the apartment where they were assembled. She was not less surprised than embarrassed to observe, in the manners of young people residing in a convent, and absence of that decorum, which includes beneath its modest shade every grace that ought to adorn the female character, like the veil which gives dignity to their air and softness to their features. When Ellena entered the room, the eyes of the whole company were immediately fixed upon her; the young ladies began to whisper and smile, and shewed, by various means, that she was the subject of conversation, not otherwise than censorious. No one advanced to meet and to encouraged her, to welcome her to the table, or still less display one of those nameless graces, with which a generous and delicate mind delights to reanimate the modest and unfortunate (94).

⁷⁰ see Clery, Introduction, *The Italian* xi-xx.

It is evident that the characters of the nuns in both convents sharply contradict each other. In contrast to San Stefano, at Santa Della Piéta Ellena experiences a warm welcome, shelter, and consolation.

The Superior, who had known her from her infancy, and from the acquaintance which such a long observation afforded, had both esteemed and loved her, received Ellena with a degree of satisfaction proportionate to the concern she had suffered when informed of her disastrous removal from Villa Altieri... The society appeared like a large family, of which the lady abbess was the mother, rather than an assemblage of strangers...She encouraged in her convent every innocent and liberal pursuit, which might sweeten the austerities of confinement, and which were generally rendered instrumental to charity (299-300).

Apart from that, in the last decades of the eighteenth century there was an aesthetic shift in perspective amid the influential elite towards the buildings of the Catholic Church, which stemmed from the discourse on the sublime and beautiful in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Not only should have the observer dissociated himself/herself from Gothic buildings as a reminder of a barbaric age, but he/she should have also surrendered to the sublime awe and admiration that radiated from them. As for Radcliffe, she was known as a mistress of such sublime scenes. Her vivid descriptions of the Catholic ruins were able to capture the reader's attention and thrill his/her mind from across the centuries. To sum up, early English Gothic writers were justly considered to be antipathetic towards the Institution of the Catholic Church as they often expressed and exploited certain concerns and apprehensions about its practices. However, in the late eighteenth century Catholicism was losing its power in many European countries and did not present such a menace anymore. There was another source of anxiety that vibrated among the people at that time: French atheism coupled with the progress and individualism of the secular age.

Third, Radcliffe followed one of the most typical features of early Gothic fiction by setting the plot of her novels in the historical past of distant foreign countries. She was fond of depicting scenes where neither the natural nor social environment resembled Britain of the eighteenth century. Displacement in time and place provided Radcliffe among others with enough freedom to experiment

with supernatural and sublime techniques while describing the grandeur and magnificence of the natural Italian sceneries. The power of the latter lie mainly in its ability to capture the reader's mind which, while being elevated, responded with pure awe and excitement. Such an example of the sublime might could be seen the chapter in which Ellena is kidnapped by banditti from villa Altieri and carried unwillingly to the convent of San Stefano. The magnitude of the strange landscape through which Ellena passes fills her with such powerful emotions that she almost forgets her pitiful situation.

The road, therefore, was carried high among the cliffs, that impended over the river, and seemed as suspended in the air; while the gloom and vastness of the precipices, which towered above and sunk bellowed it, together with amazing force and uproar of the falling waters, combined to render the pass more terrific than the pencil could describe, or language can express. Ellena ascended it, not with indifference but with calmness; she experienced somewhat of dreadful pleasure in looking down upon the irresistible flood; but this emotion was heightened into awe, when she perceived that the road led to a slight bridge... Ellena, while she was crossing it, almost forgot her misfortunes (63).

As the extract shows, Radcliffe could be hardly classed among writers who unambiguously followed only the traditions of prose fiction. Together with Lewis and the other Gothic authors, she searched for alternative sources through which she would be able to express the various shades of moods and feelings of her characters which the neo-classical novel could not. Apart from the influence of medieval romance, Elizabethan theatre, sentimental novels, and the eighteenth century poets she drew her inspiration mainly from Shakespeare and Milton. As for the former, he was the one she definitely admired the most. Radcliffe's readers thus had the opportunity to come across myriad Shakespearean quotations at the beginning of each chapter and even find within the text indelible traces of his most outstanding plays, such as *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Apart from that, her ostensible dissociation from current events served another purpose. Mrs. Radcliffe, through her book, was believed to promote national awareness by comparing national differences. As Cannon Schmitt claims, "*The Italian*, like the rest of Radcliffe's work, belongs to a period of particular importance in the formation of the English nation and the collaboration of a

concept of English national identity.”⁷¹ In other words, by the end of the eighteenth century Britain was engaged in building its own selfhood by differentiating itself from other countries, which, in a certain sense, touched a lot of the early Gothic writings. In the prelude to *The Italian* Radcliffe assured the reader to reveal to him/her the certain peculiar manners and behaviours of a strange country, which she subsequently did via an old manuscript given to the English travellers by a friar of Santa Maria del Pianto in Naples. The main body of the text then amply fulfilled the author’s promise by describing various Italian traditions and exploring ancient exotic places such as old convents, ancient ruins, and the vaults of the Inquisition, which were hitherto unknown to contemporary English readers. Even though Radcliffe passed the book off as dealing with material from an ancient and remote place and time, her works included many ambivalent allusions to modern England of the late eighteenth century. The most striking example can be found in the portrayal of the main character Ellena di Rosalba, who, even though Italian, embodied numerous essential English attributes. Moreover, as Schmitt argues:

Ellena is contradictory in a variety of ways: although of noble parentage, she must work to support herself and her aunt; she defies authority in some instances but remains obedient to the ideology of the "proper lady" in others; she lives amidst metropolitan temptation but retains an innocence so complete as to be comic. The demands of Englishness explain the need for such apparently irreconcilable character traits.⁷²

Schmitt’s quotation suggests that by portraying Ellena in such contradictory way, Radcliffe expressed her ambiguous feelings about the political, social, economical and cultural turns taking place in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. In other words, in the way she supported both aristocratic and middle class values and promoted conservative as well as progressive approaches to feminism, she showed her unclear attitude to the inevitable changes of the contemporary world.

⁷¹ Cannon Schmitt, “Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*.” *ELH* 61 (1994): 853-876. *JSTOR*. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

⁷² Schmitt, “Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*” 859.

Fourth, the critics of the late eighteenth century treated Gothic fiction with resentment and condemnation, believing that it embraced subversive thoughts towards the government and social order that promoted the ideals of the monstrous French Revolution. It is therefore surprising that Mrs. Radcliffe, as a main protagonist of this 'genre' which, in addition, in many ways "stepped away from the neo-classic," received rather laudatory and praiseful approbation.⁷³ Radcliffe no doubt shared with other Gothic writers an unconcealed taste for the supernatural and irrational as she plunged her characters into the shadows of the redoubtable Gothic underworld. However, in comparison with the majority of them, she used these techniques and devices rather to foreshadow upcoming changes in the culture she knew and liked. As Durant further testifies:

For Mrs. Radcliffe, the true gothic terrors were not the black veils and spooky passages for which she is famous, but the winds of change, dissolution, and chaos which they represented... The ruined castles and abbeys are graphic symbols of the disintegration of a stable civilisation; their underground reaches are the hiding places for all those forces which cannot stand the light of the day.⁷⁴

As Durant's quotation suggests, Mrs. Radcliffe did not consider the Gothic world a tempting adventure to set out for. She saw it rather as a dark arena into which the main characters were unwillingly thrown while forcing to abandon the familiar surroundings where they had grown up. This contradiction between traditional and hierarchical order of a loving and protective family and the chaotic, evil, and unfair Gothic underworld presented the main pattern of all Radcliffe's works. *The Italian* is no exception. Ellena's cheerful and light-hearted life in villa Altiery is disturbed by the death of her beloved aunt Bianchi and her subsequent abduction to the convent of San Stefano, where she is subjected to unfair treatment from the malicious abbess who threatens Ellena with murder if she rejects the nun's veil. By thus emphasising the sharp contrast of these environments Radcliffe desired to express the fact that true horror began when the individual left the family circle and entered the outer world, which sought only

⁷³ David Durant, "Ann Radcliffe and Conservative Gothic." *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 915-930. *JSTOR*. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

⁷⁴ David Durant, "Ann Radcliffe and Conservative Gothic" 520,524.

materialistic prospect. Cut off from the community the main hero was set adrift among the supernatural forces lurking in the strange Gothic landscape, and, while lacking social bonds, he/she suffered absolute isolation. As David Punter testifies, “in Gothic fiction, the distortion of perception caused by excessive sensibility is situated in dialectical relation to the future distortion occasioned by social isolation. Characters already prone to misjudgement find themselves cut off - in castle, convent, dungeon - from anything that might help them to correct their mistakes.”⁷⁵ In other words, since Radcliffe only foreshadowed potential horrifying terrors--never openly portraying scenes of torture or murder, it can be assumed that an oversensitive imagination is the real danger one should fear. The scene in which Vivaldi and his servant Paulo are chasing a mysterious monk among the ruins of Palluzi could be one such example. After several unnatural occurrences and escapes from the stranger, both Vivaldi and Paulo doubt his mortality.

As Vivaldi considered all these circumstances, his perplexity increased, and he was more than ever inclined to believe, that form, which had assumed the appearance of a monk, was something superhuman (77-78).

Similarly, while Vivaldi is captured by the Inquisition, the same monk visits him, seemingly passing through the walls of his cell without being noticed. Nevertheless, as was Radcliffe’s habit, she never acknowledged these occurrences as being supernatural. At the end of the book she clarified and explained away all of the unnatural scenes, much to the surprise of Vivaldi as well as her readers, who were carried away on the same wave of fantasy. Trusting more their imagination than common sense, they thus felt deceived and ashamed. In other words, Radcliffe rejected the Gothic underworld in two distinct ways. Not only did she clarify the supernatural by applying common sense, she also expressed her trust in the validity of traditional values by enabling a happy return of the main characters to the safety of their homes. The only escape from the world of business and materialism is by cutting clean the temptations of this upcoming modern age and taking to the safety of family.

⁷⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror* 67-68.

To sum up, as Durant points out, “there is far more diversity between the various novels labelled gothic than is conventionally supposed ...”⁷⁶ As for Mrs. Radcliffe, it would be a profound misunderstanding to perceive her works as promoting the agendas of the French Revolution. Rather than subversive ideas against the government and the social order, Radcliffe’s Gothic world with its dark spaces advertised the potential threats of these upcoming changes. She implicitly opposed revolutionary ideas both by denying all the benefits of outer adventures, and by restoring order by returning innocent heroines back to the family circle and punishing all the villains, which she often did at the expense of all likelihood. The heroine’s numerous escapes from the Gothic underworld thus may have suggested Radcliffe’s rejection of both the modern and the Gothic. According to the Gothic fashion, she also chose historically and geographically remote settings for developing techniques of terror via the supernatural, sublime and irrational, which the realistic novel couldn’t. In that sense she matched the new tastes for literature amid the changing readership at that time. Apart from that, Radcliffe shared a common taste for imagination with the other Gothic authors. If kept within certain boundaries, it signified a good quality found in good people; however, if exaggerated, it symbolised rather a threat to young minds who could then be liable to belief in prejudice and the supernatural. In many ways the reader recognised the typical Gothic conventions in Radcliffe’s works. However, her endeavours to strike a balance between common sense and emotion earned her as much a label as a forerunner of writers of ‘sense and sensibility’ as Jane Austen.⁷⁷

4 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN *NORTHANGER ABBEY* BY JANE AUSTEN

At the time Jane Austen was writing *Northanger Abbey*, there was still a persistent hunger for the category of cheap mass sensational fiction that daily reached an avid reading audience via popular circulating libraries. *Northanger Abbey*, the story of Catherine Morland’s adventures in Bath and subsequently

⁷⁶ Durant, “Ann Radcliffe and Conservative Gothic” 528.

⁷⁷ see Nelson C. Smith, “Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe.” *Studies in English Literature 13* (1973): 577-590. *JSTOR*. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

Northanger Abbey, was then often considered a parody that Austen created with the intention to mock these so-called novels of seduction. Catherine, the main character of the book, was in many respects like one of the ordinary girls of the nineteenth-century England. Affected by immoderate novel reading, she had a dream of falling into exciting Gothic adventures, which would have given her the chance to transform into a true heroine. However, inexperienced and naive as Catherine truly was, she constantly succumbed to an excessive imagination and false expectations about life and other people, which was elevated by novel reading and caused her an eventual inability to distinguish between reality and fiction. In *Northanger Abbey* Austen thus seemed to warn against the impact of sentimental Gothic fiction on young and easily suggestible minds. Gilbert and Gubar testify that:

... such juvenilia is important not only because in this early work Austen ridicules the false literary conventions that debase expression, thereby dangerously falsifying expectations, especially for female readers, but also because she reveals here her awareness that such conventions have inalterably shaped women's life. For Jane Austen's parody of extravagant literary conventions turns on the culture that makes women continually vulnerable to such fantasies.⁷⁸

In other words, with a parody like *Northanger Abbey* Austen pointed out the delusiveness of escapist literature that presented itself as a model for a real life. Therefore, it may be concluded that by warning the reader not to behave like Catherine and thus emphasising the poisonous impact of the Gothic novel reading, Austen classified herself among those authors who promoted the values of the patriarchal tradition inherited from the Augustan age. However, that would be a mistaken presumption. She neither agreed with the model of a heroine in the Gothic literature nor applauded the one of the angelic Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. Both the passivity and submissiveness of conservative conduct, as well as the sentimental education in "preening, reading, shopping, and dreaming," were distant and alien to Austen's concept of female heroism.⁷⁹ Therefore, it would need a thorough inspection to whose legacy and piece of writing she referred.

⁷⁸ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 113.

⁷⁹ see Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 119.

After writing such a parody of Gothic fiction as *Northanger Abbey*, one would hardly believe that Jane Austen belonged to the enthusiastic and keen readers of Gothic literature. According to Cynthia Griffin, she, as well as Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, commended herself and her family members as “great Novel-readers.”⁸⁰ She was acquainted with and fond of numerous Female Gothic novels, to which she often referred in plentiful correspondence with her friends. Nevertheless, one could hardly blame Austen for such affection. As an up-and-coming author, trying to establish herself in a world that abounded with hardly any female literary tradition, she had little material and few models to follow. No matter how much she disagreed with the devastating impact of sentimental romantic fiction, its conventions were, regrettably, the only source at her disposition. In order to move the female literary tradition forward, she decided not to deprecate such a legacy but rather exploit and reinvent its stereotypes. As Gilbert and Gubar declare:

“Rather than rejecting the gothic conventions she burlesques, Austen is very clearly criticizing female gothic in order to reinvest it with authority ... For even as she dramatizes her own alienation from a society she cannot evade or transcend, she subverts the conventions of popular fiction to describe a lonely vulnerability of girls whose lives, if more mundane, are just as thwarted as those they read about so obsessively.”⁸¹

In other words, she not only recreated the Gothic ‘genre’ but she also used its ability to conceal a content which was not assigned to a larger public. For her works definitely embodied a subversive indicia, which referred to women’s confinement in an oppressive patriarchal tradition that was abusing their sexual and economic rights. Austen’s books have to be, therefore, viewed from different angles. She not only burlesqued the Gothic genre, but she also appropriated it as a means for camouflaging her revolt concerning inescapability from the conventions and stereotyped categories attributed to women.

⁸⁰ Cynthia Griffin, “The Development of Realism in Jane Austen’s Early Novels,” *ELH* 30. (1963): 36-37. *JSTOR*. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

⁸¹ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 135, 121.

Nevertheless, at first sight, the setting at Northanger Abbey seemed to be a perfect place for Austen to give free reign to her burlesque of the genre of sentimental fiction while ridiculing Catherine Morland's pseudo-gothic escapades. Catherine, in being invited to General Tinley's mansion, hoped for encountering mysterious gothic adventures, for, in her own words, "some traditional legends, some awful memorials of an injured and ill-fated nun" (p.102). Her sensitive mind, filled with the fancy images of numerous Gothic readings, is further thrilled by Mr. Tinley's teasing while approaching Northanger Abbey:

But you must be aware that when a young lady is (by whatever means) introduced into a dwelling of this kind, she is always lodged apart from the rest of the family. While they snugly repair to their own end of the house, she is formally conducted by Dorothy the ancient housekeeper up a different staircase, and along many gloomy passages, into an apartment never used since some cousin or kind died in it about twenty years ago... 'How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment! - And what will you discern? - Not tables, toilettes, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the remains of the broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open... (114-115).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Catherine's inexperienced perception, which could be so easily blurred by other people's manipulation, together with her vivid imagination, presented a breeding-ground for ill-founded suspicions. Once she settles in Northanger Abbey, Catherine starts to fantasise irrational stories leading her to the conclusion that General Tinley, as a true Gothic villain, either murdered or shut up his innocent wife. However, as George Levine testifies, "To be sure, there was nothing monstrous in the forbidden chest in the corner of her [Catherine's] room - only a laundry list. Nor was there anything in the modern and comfortable room of General Tinley's wife, where Catherine expected to find the dead women alive, imprisoned, and wasting away."⁸² Readers then, together with Henry, can only laugh at Catherine's naiveté and wrong assumptions.

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicion you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age

⁸² George Levine, "Translating the Monstrous: Northanger Abbey," University of California Press 30. (1975): 335-350. *JSTOR*. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.

in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of probable, your own observation of what is passing around you - Does your education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? (p. 145).

Catherine is awakened from her disillusion and she realises that there were no past evil secrets hidden within the walls of an abbey. She feels ashamed and she agrees with Henry, who humbles her with the authority of the male reason for letting her over-sensitivity gain control over her imagination. Catherine's disenchantment thus seems to be a climax of the story and the reader is supposed to learn from Catherine's mistake.

However, as it was written above, Austen's works have to be read two-fold. Contemporary critics are of the same opinion that Catherine was eventually right while she presumed evil to be hidden within the walls of Northanger Abbey. However, she profoundly misinterpreted its real source. Monstrosity no longer attempted to reach its victims from the exotic past but rather incarnated into the domestic image, which threatened heroines in their social commonplace. Despite the fact that General Tinley did not murder his wife, he, indeed, turned out to be evil. His monstrous greed and financial purposes, which motivated him to invite Catherine to the abbey and later drive her out, made him a new villain, new 'Inquisitor.' That being supposed, in Catherine one had to locate an alternative type of heroine who had to humbly accept the harsh reality of ordinary life while forsaking her youthful conceptions and ideas. She, like many of the ordinary nineteenth-century women, had to acquiesce her social status, which kept her powerless by economic dependency and a lack of education.

In addition, the fact that the aberrant *Northanger Abbey* brought Catherine to the awareness of her illusion and helped her to see the reality as it was, made adventures in Northanger Abbey more real than the whereabouts in Bath. For the artificiality of the fashionable life in Bath, which represented traditional settings for female initiation and where everything dangled only around balls and marriage arrangements, left the inexperienced and innocent Catherine baffled and anxious to please other people. This can be seen, for instance, in her inability to keep attention on or even understand conversations among her friends as they speak

from their position of social status in the patriarchal and aristocratic world. Such an example can be seen in chapter IV. *Volume I*, where Catherine stands in boredom by a reencounter of Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe, who then are only speaking about children and fashion, which corresponded with typical female mature conversation at that time. In such conditions Catherine begins her training for the true heroine, however, as Gilbert and Gubar observe, “it is hard to imagine more uncongenial or unnatural course of instructions for her or for any other girl.”⁸³ In other words, only after Catherine’s pseudo-gothic experience and her subsequent disenchantment in Northanger Abbey, she is able to see the ridiculousness and hypocrisy of life in Bath, which only proved the emptiness and breakdown of the maternal and patriarchal orders. Austen thus seemed to secretly articulate the idea that everyday life was not far from gothic horror and was concerned with ordinary people, especially women.

⁸³ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 128.

5 EXPLORING GOTHIC SPACES IN *A LITTLE STRANGE* BY CANDIA MCWILLIAM

Writing in the last decades of the twentieth century, Candia McWilliam seemed to be an author almost entirely free from the most of the literary ties that bound female writers a century before. Indebted to their literary foremothers, who were often accused of being eccentric and even mad in their solitary struggle against an overly masculine literary tradition, which considered creative powers incompatible with female gender, and, subsequently, against feelings of distrust in their own artistic abilities, contemporary women could now finally present themselves and their authorship with confidence. Awareness of such hard-won freedom of speech thus spurred on women of the twentieth century to a flurry of literary activity. As Gilbert and Gubar testify:

In recent years, ... women writers have seen themselves as pioneers in a creativity so intense that their male counterparts have probably not experienced its analog since the Renaissance, or at least since the Romantic era. The son of many fathers, today's male writer feels hopelessly belated; the daughter of too few mothers, today's female writer feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition which is at last definitively emerging.⁸⁴

In other words, the connecting element of women's plentiful literary output in the twentieth century was an effort to put together the pieces of their fragmented literary tradition and re-explain its message from the female point of view. Such unflagging aspiration to challenge the persistent male perspective flowed primarily out of woman's desire to find her identity. In order to reach this self-identification women needed first to revise the stereotypical paradigms of angel and monster imposed on women by the male literary tradition. Simply put, women needed to find balance between who they felt to were and who they were supposed to be, which was, however, not an easy task. Such a process often brought opposing feelings, which the female authors expressed, for instance by heroine's struggle against a mad double, which, on one hand, she often tried to reject, but on the other, with whom she identified.

⁸⁴ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 50.

Candia McWilliam's novels are often distinguished by a considerable generic crossover. However, her allegiance to the controversial and peculiar 'genre' of Gothic fiction, in which women authors found fertile ground for their first literary attempts, is unquestionable. Just as her famous ancestress of a century before, Jane Austen, Candia McWilliam focused mainly on portraying women confined in the matrix of patriarchal expectations and their fears rising out of, for instance, marriage, childbirth, and pursuit of identity.

Concerning *A Little Stranger*, Aileen Christianson declares it to be "a Gothic tale of class, obsession and pregnancy."⁸⁵ Providing insight into the relationship of two women from different backgrounds, Mrs. McWilliam focuses on female pursuit of their own identity and also reveals the harmful impact of patriarchal socialisation on female sanity. The plot begins with Daisy, the wife of a rich and successful member of the landed gentry, hiring twée Margaret Pride as a nanny for her son John. Margaret's moving into the house launches a series of strange and peculiar events -- all seen from Daisy's perspective as the omniscient narrator -- that culminates in Margaret's envious attempt to kill her pregnant mistress in an effort to take over her identity and the role of the beloved wife and mother. The security of the familiar home then turns out to be a place of uncanny and terrifying horror, which according to the Gothic manner, leaves Daisy in both physical and psychical isolation from the outer world and the help of others. As she retrospects at the end of the story, "Together we had turned the ginger of family life into the smelt blood and ground bones of the most cruel tales (p. 178)." However, as the word "together" in Daisy's quote suggests, it would be wrong to pin the blame only on Margaret's madness. Secured by the wealth and luxury gained by her successful husband, Daisy is afforded to live in idleness, which, however, leaves her doubtful about the purpose and importance of her life. "But now, freed from cooking by the cook, from cleaning by the cleaners, from John by Margaret, I was not carefree, nor was I full of thoughts. I dared not sit still for fear of being thought in apparent idleness, for which the only excuse might have been beauty or a decent of literary output (p. 27)." Her being seems to

⁸⁵ Aileen Christianson, „Muriel Spark and Candia McWilliam: Continuities”, *Contemporary Scottish Women Authors*, ed. Aileen Christianson, Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) 95–110.

be insignificant, as she is not perceived as an independent individual but rather as someone whose identity is derived from the importance of others -- John's mother, her husband's wife, and a source of income. The example could be a scene in which Margaret wants to work in the garden with John. As she announces it to Daisy, it is obvious that she is not asking for permission, which she was already granted from John's father and a gardener, whose voices count.

'I just wondered. That is, I wonder if we might have a piece of garden?' she asked.

'We?'

'John and I. He has an interest in growing things. I would make sure he did not tread dirt inside.'

'What a marvellous idea. I'm only sorry I didn't think of it before. Where do you think?'

'I asked Daddy' (she referred thus to my husband) 'and Mount' (our gardener) 'before He went up to Scotland.' The 'h' was capitalised so that I knew that it was of my omnipotent husband that she spoke. Who was our son, if Solomon was God? Little Sol, the son of man (p. 15-16).

Suffering from a lack of importance, guilt, and no interest in her personality, Daisy concealed herself amid the luxury of the house, gluttony, and beginning pregnancy, which often distorted her common sense and judgement. Ashamed of herself and her life, she hires Margaret Pride only to appease the compunction rising up from judgmental thoughts about herself. "Margaret had been the stranger whom our family could not accommodate. Though we were four, we were almost overcome by her single strength. What was the strangest thing of all? I took her in because I hated her on sight, and was ashamed of myself for doing so (p. 178)." Therefore, it is not surprising that Daisy also refuses to see Margaret's true face and almost lets her kill her and steal her position in household. Such isolation, insecurity, and an escape from the reality of her life makes her accomplice in the tragedy. As Christianson testifies, "McWilliam weaves Grimm brothers' fairy story in which no-one is innocent, recording the madness of pregnancy and distorted effects of riches, with a narrator who stands 'outside, alone, at the

margin of the house and park'(25), incompletely absorbed into her social settings, before casting herself off into the tide of her pregnancy.⁸⁶ In other words, in pursuit of identity, both women have access to the various destructive solutions which are supposed to soothe or substitute for the emptiness they feel inside. One of the most devastating escapes occurs definitely through an eating disorder, which slowly ruins Daisy as well as Margaret. While Margaret attempts to "diet herself to beauty and crash herself into the sights of my [Daisy's] husband"(30), Daisy indulges herself in uncontrollable overeating. Moreover, an ostensible power over the amount of consumed food gives Margaret a false sense of control over her life. With Daisy's gluttony, she perceives food as a placatory shelter tucked away from the expectations and complexity of the outer world. Eating thus brings her feelings of comfort:

That weekend when Margaret and John Solomon were in London was a lost weekend, thought you will see its scars on my green marble legs and leg-o-mutton arms. Eleonora must have sensed I was about to do wrong. What we did together, I and my conscript accessory to the fat, was attend a children's party lasting twenty-four hours, party for ourselves alone. Seven loaves with chocolate hail, white milk bread paved with butter and the pastel sugared aniseed the Dutch call little mice, mob caps of jelly and lakes of cream, egg sandwiches for a team of hungers, and shoals of herring, pink, silver, white, grey, and the morbid maroon which is so delicious eaten with warm yellow potatoes and cold soured cream off a hot spoon... Having been made to feel small, I chose to make myself large... It was so beautiful; how could it do harm?"(27).

Wandering about the numerous rooms of the mansion, both women pursue identity, value, and control over own life. Together with the other women of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Margaret and Daisy perch between social expectations and their own desires while confronting male paradigms. One of the most difficult stereotypes to break out of was the inflexible perception of female beauty. As Gilbert and Gubar points out:

Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about - perhaps even loathing of - her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to "reduce" her own body... In our own era it has

⁸⁶ Aileen Christianson, *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* 100.

spawned innumerable diets and “controlled” fats, as well as the extraordinary phenomenon of teenage anorexia.⁸⁷

The female obsession with her own body presents one of the central themes of *A Little Stranger*. “Naturally, the nannies gossiped. I and my friends knew this because some of these friends gossiped with their nannies. It was cosy talk, scandal with milk, of babies, fiancés, naughtiness...The main topic, however, seemed to be weight (31).” Margaret’s and Daisy’s self esteem is determined by their ability to fit the general requirements regarding female beauty. Both of them live under the false assumption that only slim and attractive women are worth love and appreciation. Therefore, Margaret keeps record of the caloric value of the food she eats and casts herself into shamed isolation when she starts gaining weight.

To sum up, the mansion, in which Daisy lives surrounded only by servants, represents both a metaphorical and literal Gothic prison. Secured by the money her husband earns, she experiences a secluded and idle life in which she is not given enough space or stimulation to express the mental and creative powers that would help her find her self, identity, and value. Such an architectural as well as institutional confinement of heroines within the walls of the man’s house was a frequent theme of female authors from the last two centuries, which too often symbolised their pursuit of authentic and honest authorship. In order to help heroines and themselves escape from such incarceration, the authors often created a mad double which helped them to pull the bonds apart and release the suffocating wrath. As Gilbert and Gubar claim:

For it is, after the all, through violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male house and male texts, while at the same time it is through double’s violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained...Defining themselves as the prisoners of their own gender, for instance women frequently create characters who attempt to escape if only into nothingness, through the suicidal self-starvation of anorexia.

⁸⁷ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 54.

Similarly, in a metaphorical elaboration of bulimia, the disease of overeating which is anorexia's complement and mirror image."⁸⁸

Both themes--the mad double and escape--appear firmly in McWilliam's *A Little Stranger*. Having different class backgrounds, Margaret and Daisy seem to have little in common. Nevertheless, it soon becomes apparent that Margaret doubles Daisy's life in many ways. Their ill attempts to escape their current lives and pursue new identities represents various forms of either coping with or rebelling against patriarchal socialisation and influence.

⁸⁸ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 85-86.

CONCLUSION

Gothic fiction has always portrayed a world in which emotions and imagination were far more important than reason and sense and where passion and pleasure held sway over the values and morality of society. Its dark spaces such as decaying castles, medieval churches and abbeys, or the uncanny chambers of a familiar home enable individuals to transform into the monsters that threatened the social order with their various lecherous passions, excesses, and transgressions. In the image of the outcast standing at the margins of society, Gothic authors thus incarnated the various taboos, fears, and threats of ordinary individuals trying to cope with their confused feelings of identity amid a more complex and complicated modern world. The task of this thesis, therefore, was to examine why Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Candia McWilliam chose this peculiar 'genre' of Gothic fiction as a mode of expression, and what was the meaning of the secret message concealed in the shadows of the dark spaces lurking in their books.

First, in order to answer this uneasy question, it is necessary to keep in mind that all of the authors, though living in different centuries, were women. For a long period of time, creative powers, including writing, were unsympathetic to the female gender, and those who challenged them were written off as unnatural and even insane. There was a general division between male and female duties and the occupations for which man and women were created. Innately, women were determined for life within the walls of the family house in which they were supposed to devote themselves unquestioningly to the household and to the pleasures of their husbands. The house should have protected them from the temptations and dangers of the outside--male--world, to which they would definitely succumb due to a naturally sensitive and weak character. They were asked to train themselves to become the so-called Angel of the house so that they would not become monsters. Concerning their writing skills, female authors thus often doubted their artistry and subsequently their right to authorship. In order to satisfy the call to creativity and the desire to tell their story, women usually employed inferior genres which were regarded by men as of lesser quality and, therefore, were not at the centre of general attention. Underestimating their

writing abilities and afraid of expressing their own perspective, women often distorted the message of their writings so that it would fit general prejudices, and they learned how to conceal their desired content in such a way that only the dedicated could identify it. Therefore, Gothic fiction equipped women with all the necessary means needed for their odd expression. Dealing with various ill passions, excesses and transgressions, as a pen in a woman's hand undoubtedly was, and enabling them to hide unspoken fears, desires, and taboos, Gothic fiction provided women with the opportunity to write history from their own perspective and thereby establish the foundations of female literary tradition. From this it follows that even though Mrs. Austen's *Northanger Abbey* definitely presented a parody and derision to the sentimental 'genre' that taught women to apply sensibility over sense, Gothic fiction was the only female literary legacy in which she could continue. Therefore, Austen, as well as McWilliam in the twentieth century, decided to employ proudly the Gothic 'genre' as a means of articulation and elevate it to a higher level. As Gilbert and Gubar testify:

The women writer -- and we shall see women doing this over and over again -- searches for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her "femininity" but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavours. At the same time, like most women in the patriarchal society, the women author does experience her gender as a painful obstacle, or even the debilitating inadequacy ... Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feeling of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers ...⁸⁹

In other words, in the 'Gothic' genre women over the centuries struggled for artistic self-definition and recognition of validity of their authorship. Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Candia McWilliam, therefore, could be conceived of as the flag-bearers for this unique literary tradition.

Second, as written above, there were clear expectations and requirements for proper female behaviour, according to which a woman should have followed the model of the Angel of the House, which insisted on her submissiveness to her husband and the good care of her household. If a woman did not identify herself

⁸⁹ Gilbert, Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* 50.

with this estimable ideal and dared to claim her desires and wants, she was seen as an unnatural and sexually driven monster undermining the rules created by men and therefore worthy of dismissal. However, in the still more complex world of modern society women could hardly sympathise with such narrow definitions imposed on them without their approval. Not surprisingly, a struggle between prescribed female roles within society and their personal desires and wishes appeared. Women, therefore, put their hope in the Gothic 'genre,' namely that it would be able to keep their voice and transmit their message to a generation of sisters under the same fate. By applying traditional Gothic settings such as abandoned gothic castles, medieval abbeys, dancing parlours and later a familiar house--the places in which women were locked away by men or which were assigned to them as their natural environment--female authors wanted to express women's confinement and loneliness in the matrix of oppressive patriarchy from which they were trying to find an exit. For its suffocating and debilitating atmosphere provided women neither personal nor material security nor freedom nor sufficient education or opportunities. Throughout Gothic literature women, therefore, started to pursue their own identity as well as direction in a world that, since the end of the eighteenth century, had become more complex and confusing. These aspects are intrinsic to the works of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Candia McWilliam even though several centuries divide their lived experience. Similarly, they each sought an escape for both their heroines and themselves from the bondages of social expectations and prescribed social roles. Only through the admirable faithfulness and diligence of these authors to the legacy of their foremothers did female literary tradition have a chance to continue and survive into the present time. Gothic literature, therefore, does not merely occupy a dusty corner in a time foregone but stands in an open arena to help further reveal the female perspective on world history and enter into the record their unique stories and unique experience.

SUMMARY

Důležitost gotického románu a jeho vliv na hlavní směry světové literatury podněcuje mnoho kontroverzních debat i mezi znalci a kritiky dnešní doby. Jednou z mnoha diskutovaných oblastí tohoto žánru je bezesporu využití a význam gotických prostor, které provází gotický román od samého počátku. Avšak dříve než se dostaneme k odhalování tajemství těchto tmavých zákoutí, je důležité plně porozumět žánrovému i historickému kontextu gotického románu. Od svého počátku byla gotická literatura považována spíše za snahu o experiment než za průlomový objev, který by určil nový směr v oblasti literatury a vybudoval si dlouhotrvající tradici. Mísíce v sobě prvky středověké romance a realistického románu, gotická literatura se soustřeďovala zvláště na vyobrazení nadpřirozených a fantastických dobrodružství, která se vymykala každodenní čtenářově zkušenosti a měla pramalý význam na rozšíření jeho znalostí či posílení morální stránky jeho osobnosti. Této inovační snaze se proto ve většině případů nedostalo pozitivního hodnocení kritiky a vzdělané elity, jelikož neodpovídala jednoduchosti a řádu Osvícenství, které bylo v 18. století metrem pro posouzení kvality a hodnoty literárního díla. Na druhé straně se však tento neobvyklý pokus překvapivě setkal s ohlasem střední vrstvy, jejíž velikost i význam koncem 18. a začátkem 19. století značně stoupal.

Během několika let tak literatura s gotickými prvky zaplavila spotřebitelský trh a stala se nedílnou součástí zábavy střední vrstvy. Avšak v polovině 19. století popularita gotického románu začala prudce klesat a díky nízké poptávce žánr skoro zanikl. Čtenáři byli přesyceni sentimentálním příběhy se stereotypními prvky jako například prostředí středověkého hradu a kláštera, ohrožení citlivé hrdinky zloduchy a bandity nebo nečekaný výskyt tajemného spektrálního jevu, které v nich lacinou cestou vzbuzovaly pocit napětí a strachu. Lidé prahli po literatuře, která by lépe odpovídala jejich nové životní zkušenosti ve stále komplikovanější podobě světa, která se vyznačovala stále náročnějšími sociálními vztahy a vazbami. Gotická tematika se nicméně dochovala až do dnešní doby a to díky autorům, kteří využili gotických prvků pro vyvolání napětí v čtenáři a tak přispěli ke zpestření svých děl. Pokud se někdo pokusil o obnovení

gotického románu, jeho podoba spíše připomínala temnou verzi hlavního směru literatury své doby jako například romantismu nebo realismu.

Důležitost gotických prvků neskvěla pouze v umění přilákat a udržet čtenářovu pozornost, ale také v jejich schopnosti skrýt v sobě rozličné touhy, přání, hrozby, strachy a tabu čtenářů, které sebou přinášel pokrok a vývoj společnosti a které povaha oficiální literatury nedokázala pojmout. Typické gotické prostory například umožnily autorovi ztělesnit rozličná společenská znepokojení a stinné stránky světového pokroku, jako například chlípné podivíny a monstra, kteří z tmavých uliček městské architektury ohrožovali stabilitu a bezpečnost jednotlivců i celé společnosti. Spisovatelé tak díky gotickým prvkům dokázali zaznamenat neoficiální a temnější historii světového vývoje a pokroku.

Abychom plně porozuměli významu a využití prostor v dílech *The Italian*, *Northanger Abbey*, a *A Little Stranger*, musíme mít na paměti, že všechny autorky byly ženy, které z určitých důvodů našly zalíbení v gotickém románu. Současná vědecká bádání zjistila, že volba žen využít tento žánr jako prostředek vyjádření nebyla nahodilá. Tento fakt vedl současné odborníky k obnovení výzkumů, jež by nahlížely na gotický román z ženské perspektivy. Inklinace spisovatelek ke gotické literatuře během konce 18. a začátku 19. století má nepochybně co do činění se statusem ženy v soudobé společnosti. Tehdejší svět zastával názor, že existují typicky mužské profese, které žena nemůže zvládnout, jelikož její tělesné a mentální dispozice tomu neodpovídají. Zatímco mužům patřil život na veřejnosti, do kterého spadala například politika a umění, ženin svět se omezoval na zdi rodinného domu, kterému měla vládnout svědomitou a laskavou rukou. Angažovanost žen ve světě mužů byla viděna jako něco nepřírozeného a nepřístojného a pokud se některá ze zástupkyň něžného pohlaví pokusila vstoupit do zakázaného území, byla společensky odsouzena a znemožněna. Psaní i ostatní kreativní činnosti patřily do kategorie, kterou ovládali muži. Ženy, které měly touhu projevit své spisovatelské nadání, musely zvolit žánr, který byl považován za okrajový, a proto nebyl v centru mužské pozornosti. Navíc byly často nuceny zkreslit děj i poselství svého příběhu tak, aby odpovídal perspektivě a požadavkům patriarchy a zbytečně veřejnost neprovokoval. Jelikož gotický román nepředstavoval ohnisko zájmu mužů a navíc od počátku vykazoval

schopnost být ambivalentní a tak ukrýt poselství, které bylo určeno pouze zasvěceným, ženy si je zvolily za medium a prostředníka.

V gotickém románu ženy položily základ typicky ženské literární tradice, která umožnila zachovat a předat dalším generacím jejich neoficiální verzi světové historie. Hlavním tématem bylo uvěznění žen v systému hodnot a pravidel patriarchy, který byl často symbolizován dusivou atmosférou typicky ženských prostor jako klášter, taneční sál nebo domov, z kterých autorky zoufale hledaly únik jak pro své hrdinky, tak pro sebe. Ačkoliv tvorbu Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen a Candia McWilliam odděluje několik století, všechny autorky se v ní hrdě hlásí k odkazu svých předchůdkyň. Literární tradice mající kořeny v gotickém románu je totiž jediná, na kterou tyto ženy mohou navázat a v které jako spisovatelky i ženy mohou nalézt své sebeurčení a identitu. Gotická román proto zdaleka nepředstavuje okrajový žánr, který neměl na vývoj světové literatury význam. Naopak je stále živoucím odkazem jedinečné literární historie, která má před sebou nepochybně slibnou budoucnost.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY LITERATURE SOURCES

Austen, Jane, Claudia L. Johnson. *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sandition*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

McWilliam, Candia. *A Little Stranger*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.

Radcliffe, Ann. *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

SECONDARY LITERARY SOURCES

Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*. Oxford: OUP, 1992.

Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Bousquet, Francois. "The Enlightenment Foundation of Modern Europe." *International Review of Mission* 95 (2006): 237-246. [EBSCO. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.ebsco.com>>.]

Burke, Edmund. *Of the Sublime. The Gothic Novel*. Ed. Victor Sage. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1990. 33.

Christianson, Aileen. *Muriel Spark and Candia McWilliam: Continuities Contemporary Scottish Women Authors*. Ed. Aileen Christianson, Alison Lumsden. Edinburgh: EUP, 2001.

Cleary E.J. 'Introduction' to *The Italian*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

Durant, David. "Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic." *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 519-530. [JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.]

Fleenor, Juliann E. 'Introduction' to *The Female Gothic*. Montreal: Eden Press, 1983.

- Gilbert, Sandra M., Susan Gubar. *The Mad Woman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Griffin, Cynthia. "The Development of Realism in Jane Austen's Early Novels." *ELH* 30 (1963): 36-37. [JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.]
- Haigh, Christopher. *The Cambridge Historical Encyclopaedia of Great Britain and Ireland*. Cambridge: CUP, 1985.
- Levine, George. "Translating the Monstrous. *Northanger Abbey*." *University of California Press* 30 (1975): 335-350. JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.
- McIntyre, Clara F., "Were the "Gothic Novels" Gothic?." *PMLA* 37. 664-667. [JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.]
- Peck, John, Martin Coyle. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Punter, David., Glennis Byron. *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day*. (Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1996.
- Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic*. Harlow: Longman, 1996.
- Sage, Victor. *The Gothic Novel*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990.
- Schmitt Cannon. "Techniques of Terror, Technologies of Nationality: Ann Radcliffe's *the Italian*." *ELH* 61 (1994): 853-876. [JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.]
- Smith, Nelson C. "Sense, Sensibility and Ann Radcliffe." *Studies in English Literature* 13 (1973): 577-590. [JSTOR. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 3 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.jstor.org>>.]

Thackeray, William. *The Angel in the House*. 20 Mar. <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html>.

Tompkin, Joyce. *The Gothic Romance. The Gothic Novel*. Ed. Victor Sage. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1990. 87.

ANOTACE

This theses deals with the significance of Gothic spaces in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, and Candia McWilliam's *A Little Stranger*. Before looking closer at the particular phenomena in the individual works, the theoretical part of this thesis will focus mainly on explaining the origins and continuity of the generic and historical context of Gothic literature and the importance of Gothic spaces in general. As all the discussed works of fiction are written by women there is also a chapter devoted to the literary tradition of the female Gothic 'genre.' The practical part is devoted entirely to the explanation of Gothic spaces in *The Italian*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *A Little Stranger*. There is close inspection given to the unique historical life experience of all three authors, which in different ways influenced the messages hidden in the Gothic places of their works. There is also an attempt to find a continuity amid all three works that centers primarily on finding a distinctive female literary tradition and its struggle for recognition and validation throughout the centuries.