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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Female Gothic in Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*

Ženská gotika ve *Zlodějce* a *Malém vetřelci* od Sarah Waters

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá dvěma romány autorky Sarah Waters, *Zlodějkou* (2002) a *Malým vetřelcem* (2009), které zkoumá z pohledu dvou rozdílných teorií ženské gotiky, subžánru gotické literatury. V obou knihách se u ženských postav hojně vyskytuje pocit uvěznění v domě, ve kterém žijí, temno a nadpřirozeno. Všechny tyto prvky jsou pro definování ženské gotiky zásadní. Na romány budou postupně aplikované dvě teorie. Autorkou první je Anne Williams, která ženskou gotiku staví do opozice k mužské. Tyto módy rozlišuje podle formy vypravěče, přístupu k nadpřirozeným elementům a závěru děje. Druhým konceptem bude pohled Ellen Moers, která do ženské gotiky řadí všechny gotické knihy napsané ženami, avšak klade také důraz na prostředí, ve kterém se příběh odehrává, a na pocity, které v ženských postavách vzbuzuje. Předmětem následné interpretace budou vypravěč, nadpřirozené prvky a zakončení každého z románů Pozornost bude dále soustředěna na domy a blázince, které se ve *Zlodějce* a *Malém vetřelci* vyskytují, a pocity uvěznění, beznaděje, pochmurna a temna, které v ženských postavách vyvolávají. Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda podle Williams *Zlodějka* a *Malý vetřelec* spadají spíše do ženské nebo do mužské gotické literatury, a ověřit, zda je možné obě díla zařadit do ženské gotické literatury tak, jak ji chápe Moers.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Ženská Gotika, Gotická Literatura, Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith*, *The Little Stranger*

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses two novels by Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith* (2002) and *The Little Stranger* (2009), and analyses them through two different theories of Female Gothic, which is a subgenre of Gothic literature. Both books are replete with female characters experiencing feelings of confinement in the house they live in as well as darkness, and the supernatural. All of these features are crucial when defining the Female Gothic. One by one, the two theories will be applied to the novels. The author of the first is Anne Williams, who contrasts Female Gothic mode with Male Gothic mode. She distinguishes between these modes using the narrator, the approach to the supernatural, and the conclusion of the plot. The second concept is by Ellen Moers. She establishes that all Gothic books written by women are Female Gothics, however, she also highlights the setting of the story and the feelings it evokes in female characters. The subject of interpretation will be the narrator, the supernatural elements and the conclusion of the novels. Attention will also be paid to houses and madhouses that appear in *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*, and the feelings of confinement, gloominess, and hopelessness they induce in the female characters. The aim of this thesis is to discover if, according to Williams, *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger* belong rather to the Female or Male Gothic, and verify whether they can both be categorized as Female Gothic, as understood by Moers.

KEYWORDS

Female Gothic, Gothic Literature, Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith*, *The Little Stranger*

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1 Introduction

Two years ago, my thesis supervisor recommended a novel by Sarah Waters to me. The novel was the author's latest historical crime pastiche, *The Paying Guests* (2014), which I eagerly finished in a few days. Immersed in the forbidden love romance, a crime of passion and a nail-biting court trial I could not help but worry about the time the narration spent on describing the mundane domestic tasks, such as scrubbing the floors in the house or fretting about the dinner. Overall, however, I could not wait to read more from the British author. The second recommendation I received was Waters' ghost-story novel, *The Little Stranger* (2009). Thinking I knew what to expect from one-third of "the holy trinity" of lesbian fiction writers[1], as Emma Donoghue dubbed Waters, I was taken aback a little by the lack of lesbians in the novel, for there were none. My brief disappointment was, however, forgotten as the plot sucked me in and did not release my attention until the wee hours of the morning when I finished the novel. Needless to say, I could not sleep that night, not because the novel was frightful, but because I was livid. I was furious about the depiction of the double standards at play when considering a woman's and a man's obligations toward the house in which they live. In the case of *The Little Stranger*, it was the narrator's decisive opinion that the son of the family leaving the family mansion was excusable, whereas the daughter was shamed for having the exact same intentions. Such double standard made my blood boil. When the daughter of the family, Caroline, expresses her wish to sell her late parent's house and leave the country, she is met with a sharp discouragement from her distant family as well as the narrator himself. The reactions of the narrator and family friends seemed to me too unjust and infuriating. Why is a daughter expected to take care of her parent's house, and a son is not? Why are her wants to emancipate herself praised by society and leaving her parent's house is not? And in this particular case, why did the thing that haunted Hundreds Hall kill Caroline and let her brother live?

Because I wanted to know more about the Gothic genre, my search began with the introduction to *Gothic and Gender: An introduction* by Donna Heiland. In

[1] The other members of this sacred lesbian trio are Jeanette Winterson and Ali Smith.

the monograph that observes gender tensions within the genre, Heiland claims all Gothic novels deal with “transgressions” (4-5), by which she means violations of the rules of society, national identities, one’s sexuality and even personal identity (3). Heiland proposes that the transgressive acts depicted in Gothic fiction shine light onto the patriarchal structures that influence gender roles in public and private spheres (5) and are therefore frequently used to indirectly comment on the patriarchy which I later discovered to be one of the functions of the Gothic genre. The term Female Gothic suddenly started to appear in almost every text I would read. Female Gothic was first used and defined by Ellen Moers in her monograph *Literary Women* (1976) to describe literary works written in Gothic genre by women authors. However, the more literature I perused, the more perplexed I became by the usage of the term, for it seemed that the scholars do not appear to be uniform in their understanding of the term. Some put emphasis on the gender of the author, some prefer to focus on Gothic tropes and some opt to study narrative elements, i.e. the plot and the narrator, in order to determine which novel does or does not belong to the Female Gothic.

Having found the subject of Female Gothic fruitful, I have selected two concepts through which I shall observe two novels by Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith* (2002) and *The Little Stranger* (2009). The first concept is by Ellen Moers who originally coined the term. She posits the authors of Female Gothic are women authors and therefore bases the work being part of the tradition primarily on the gender of the author, and secondarily on the setting and its connection to the female characters’ feelings of confinement. The second concept is Anne Williams’ understanding of Female and Male Gothic, a dichotomy of Gothic modes that does not view the gender of the author of the work as crucial. Instead, the terms are defined through binary oppositions in the narrator, the explanation of the supernatural and the conclusion of the plot. Moers was the first to use and define the term of Female Gothic and Williams in part bases her dichotomy on said definition. Despite that, for the sake of clarity, in this thesis, Williams’ concept will be addressed first, for it is the one that requires to be accompanied by the synopses of the books. Even though the objectives of both halves of the Practical Part are interpretations of the novels, the synopses will provide a necessary backbone for Williams’ dichotomy of Gothic modes.

In the analysis, I will be working with two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that both novels fit into what is understood by Ellen Moers as Female Gothic. Since Sarah Waters is a female author that has written Gothic fiction, according to Moers theory, her novels should belong to Female Gothic. The second hypothesis states that viewed through Anne Williams's Female and Male Gothic modes, and estimates that *Fingersmith* belongs to the Female Gothic mode, and *The Little Stranger* rather to the Male Gothic mode. As the narrative techniques differ in each novel, and the supernatural elements are approached differently, I believe the modes in which they are written are not the same.

In order to be able to affirm or dispute set hypotheses, the two approaches to Female Gothic will be presented in the Theoretical Part, along with a broader context of Gothic fiction and Water's work and her inspirations behind the two novels. Subsequently, in the Practical Part, I will present an interpretation of the two novels according to said concepts. I will seek those features and aspects of the books deemed relevant and important by the Theoretical Part. Mainly inside spaces as the only possible places for female travel in Gothic novels, and tropes of insanity in connection to female characters.

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Beginnings of the Gothic Novel

Andrew Smith's *Gothic Literature* (2013) sets Gothic novel into the context of the literary canon, declaring that as soon as there were novels as such, narrations replete with grand medieval architecture, gloomy passages, underground trappings and helpless women filled the pages of novels written at the time (4). Among the most recognisable novels, there belong Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Walpole is said to be the pioneer of the Gothic novel (Childs 172), although it is rather hard to detect its true creator (Smith 4). The Gothic novel is a subgenre of fiction, characterised by sombre settings, mysterious enigmas, secluded sites, feeling of fearful apprehension, polarised good and evil characters, melodrama, foreboding and suggested or explicit horror (Childs 172). Gothic fiction seeks to control the readers' feelings, aiming to unease and terrify them (Snodgrass 338). Despite its predominance in the second half of the 18th century, the Gothic has lingered in the literary tradition to the present day. Indeed, both Danel Olson, the author of *21st-Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels Since 2000* (2010), and Donna Heiland, the author of feminist critique *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (2005), stipulate that the movies, television programmes and video games in mainstream media all contribute to and reflect the genre's immense popularity.

Academics estimate that the longevity of the macabre genre is based on its great popularity among the public and timeless appeal in serving the reader a dash of fright while working with themes that are universal and perennial. Such themes include but are not limited to the unknown, life, death, revenge and conflict. However, the themes are not the most recognisable elements of the Gothic tradition. For what distinguishes the Gothic are the motifs the genre is replete with. Those motifs include "[r]epresentations of ruins, castles, and monasteries, and forms of monstrosity, and images of insanity, transgression, the supernatural, and excess..." (Smith 4) with the quintessential leitmotif being the house. According to Kirsti Bohata, Gothic literature employs the trope of the house to symbolise a number of things. However, most often, it stands for "imprisoning structures of

patriarchy, by which women are confined and from which they must escape" (180). Seeing the house as a place of physical confinement, the author links it to the Female Gothic, a subgenre of the Gothic, coined by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976). Moers' pioneering category of Female Gothic inspired Anne Williams who distinguished two modes of Gothic fiction. Williams refuses to categorise Gothic literature according to the gender of its authors and instead determines a set of criteria by with she gauges in what mode a work is written. Williams' subcategorization is reiterated in the following subchapter.

2.2 Anne William's Dichotomy of Gothic Modes

An original study of Gothic literature was done by Anne Williams who disagrees with Moers' definition of Female Gothic based primarily on the gender of the author. On the contrary, Williams views Female Gothic as a narrative mode which an author of any gender might embrace. In her *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Williams raises a need to recognise a binary opposite for the Female mode which she supplies with the term Male Gothic while asserting that both modes express the theme of entrapment in slightly different ways. The three criteria Williams proposes to distinguish the two modes are the narrator, the overall attitude toward the supernatural phenomena, the conclusion of the plot (102). William argues that both modes, i.e. the Female Gothic mode and the Male Gothic mode, operate through prose, poetry and drama of the 18th and 19th century alike and further argues the discrepancies between the two binary modes are most striking in the 20th-century fiction (Williams 100-1).

2.2.1 Female and Male Gothics

Williams contends the mass popularity of paperback Gothic novels widely read by women in the second half of the 20th century. At that time, the term Gothic became associated with books which enjoyed a massive female readership and which one could usually buy in "drugstore[s] and supermarket paperback shelves" (101) and which were written by female and male authors (11). "Those novels" (101), Williams notes,

> asked to be judged by their covers, which invariably depicted the heroine and an imposing, ancient edifice set in a wild landscape. Usually it was night, dimly illuminated by a moon half-hidden in clouds. The heroine was always fleeting the house (dark except for one lighted window high in a tower); she wore a look of terror and a diaphanous garment that might be either ball gown or nightgown. (101)

The author notes the covers and titles of the mass-marketed Female Gothic novels, such as "the *Mistress of Mellyn* or the *Lady Mallow*" (Williams 101, original emphasis), signal a formulaic plot and use stock tropes of Gothic literature such as heroine confined inside an old house helplessly trying to break free. The Female Gothic, according to Williams, achieves suspense through the limits of the narrator, as the narrator, often the heroine herself, is limited by her knowledge or lack thereof (102). The supernatural elements, such as ghosts and spectres, are usually rationally explained in the Female Gothic. The heroine realises the terrors she experiences are results of human doings. And finally, the plot always resolves and terminates with a happy ending, usually with a heroine "and the master of the house" (Williams 101) happily getting married. That way,

> [the] heroine experiences a rebirth. She is awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and, most important, a new identity. Indeed, she is often almost literally reborn, rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world. (Williams 104)

Novels written in the Female Gothic mode were being either rediscovered by the readers, as in the case of reprints of the Daphne du Maurier's success *Rebecca* (1938) (Williams 102) or written in the mid-century Gothic revival which began with Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960) (Williams 101) and was followed by many others (102). Alongside the Female Gothic boom, there reappeared another mode of narration which Williams calls Male Gothic. The masculine mode was first introduced in *Rosemary's Baby*

(1965) and the wave of frightful novels by Fred Mustard Steward and Stephen King that followed (Williams 102).

Male Gothic generates the suspense through "dramatic irony created by multiple points of view" (102) that forms a distance between the narrators and the female protagonist. As the narrator of the Male Gothic is seldom the heroine herself, the reader is not provided with the female character's point of view. Williams demonstrates this on King's *Carrie* (1973) where the narration consists of passages from academic texts, police reports and witness accounts of the tragedy as well as the narrator's observation of the titular girl who is seen as a subject one should be fascinated by (102-3). Subsequently, the approach toward the supernatural differs from that of its counterpart in that the Male Gothic accepts it as a part of its world (103) and therefore does not provide an explanation.

While the Female Gothic usually concludes in a generally consented happy ending, the Male Gothic has a tragic conclusion. Similarly, while the heroine of the Female Gothic symbolically triumphs over the evil through marriage, her tragic double does not share the success, but "fails and dies" (103). Where the conclusion of the Female Gothic reaches a clear end, the Male Gothic leaves room for uncertainty. Lastly, the Male Gothic prefers horror over terror, still focusing on female plight but observing it from the perspective of an onlooker.

2.3 Ellen Moers' Elements of Female Gothic

Moers's 1976 monograph, *Literary Women*, describes the Female Gothic as "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (90). Furthermore, the author claims that what is labelled as Gothic cannot be easily defined "except it has to do with fear" (Moers 90). Moers's brief and opaque definition came to be a stepping stone for further studies of Gothic novels written by female authors, as stated by Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith in the introduction to their special edition of *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (2009). The authors stress the significance of the term, as Moers' original work has influenced

a myriad of scholarly works on the Female Gothic as well as helped anchor Gothic genre in the academic research altogether (Wallace and Smith 1).

Moers addresses and examines many authors and works, from Mary Shelley and Christina Rossetti to the Brontë sisters, in search of elements their works have in common. Eventually, she comes to the conclusion that novels penned by women authors depict journeys their heroines undertake differently than the heroes of male authors. Men were generally encouraged to travel and the depictions of adventurous journey of their heroes could therefore be relied on their personal knowledge, whereas, for women of the 18th and 19th century, travelling abroad was not common (Moers 128). Therefore, female writers either send their heroines on journeys to places the authors would only know from travel books or would set their narratives in surroundings that their characters could roam independently in, and that is inside. Moers argues the inside setting is highly important for female authors, as it was predominantly indoors their characters were able to move without the restrains of society.

2.3.1 Two Types of Travel; The Significance of Indoor Spaces

As the surroundings in which the story unravels are a significant component of Moers' theory, the following subchapter will commence with her dichotomy of travel which highlights the importance of the indoor space in the Female Gothic. In the chapter dedicated to the work of Ann Radcliffe, who is referred to as "the mistress of the pure Gothic form" (91), Moers states the author's usage of the Gothic form enabled her female characters to set onto adventurous "journeys without offending the proprieties" (126) of the time. The scholar further distinguishes between two types of travel Radcliffe's heroines embark on, conveniently named after their settings, outdoor travel and indoor travel. The first type, Moers claims, ought to be looked at with the perspective of female authors and their time. The author notes that Radcliffe's female characters, as well as the author herself, were restricted in their travel prospects. Therefore, the outdoor travel mirrored their naïve and romantic depictions of distant places. Alas, Radcliffe's depiction of Italy was constructed from the author's knowledge gained mainly "from paintings, theatre backdrops, and travel books" (Moers 128). While the aforementioned type of travel may amuse a contemporary reader, it is the second type of travel that "produced a richer literary

tradition" (129), Moers notes. For "indoors, inside Mrs Radcliffe's castles, her heroines can scuttle miles along corridors, descent into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperone, because the Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor and therefore freely female space" (126). During Radcliffe's time, the only feasible way a female heroine could travel freely whilst remaining her respectability was indoor (129), since "[f]or heroines, the mere walking was suspect" (130). Thus, females were not encouraged to go on solitary walks and more often than not were observed by governesses or family members. Therefore, despite being confined predominantly inside, female characters were able to gain some agency while not disrupting the social perceptions of their virtues.

2.3.2 Women in Madhouses and Madwomen in Houses

Consequently, Moers opines the Female Gothic still lives on in its most potent form "in the indoor setting" (132) which usually involves the trope of the house where the heroine is entrapped. However, Moers claims that having departed from the locus of a castle or a school for girls, the setting is more evocative of dreary "insane asylum" (132). In fact, Moers mentions three, then contemporary, authors[2], whom each had published a novel "dealing with madness in the institutional setting" (132) in the 1960s. Moers links the blooming literary works of the 1960s back to the Gothic literature of the 18th century, noting that the motif of female incarceration in a mental institution belongs to the Female Gothic tradition (132). In 1798, *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria* written by Mary Wollstonecraft was published. The titular character of the novel is imprisoned inside an asylum by her oppressive husband despite being fully lucid. The way the madhouse is described, Moers observes, resembles the castles of the Gothic novels, surrounded by walls with iron bars mounted into window frames (133-134). The terror usually depicted in Gothic novels, Moers adds, was seen by Mary Wollstonecraft not as fantastical whims but as harsh "realities of a woman's life" (134). The theme of female insanity stems from gender-biased studies of mental illnesses and their cures, claims Snodgrass (190) and was

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[2] The authors and their works are Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964), which was published under a pen name Hannah Green, and Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (1961).

studied by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their acclaimed study of 19th-century female literary tradition *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979)[3],.

In their seminal work, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that the images of insanity are inevitably linked to female literary tradition, not only through the female heroines but also through the female authors themselves. "[B]y projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad and monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the structures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (Gilbert and Gubar 78). That way, the madwomen should not be viewed as mere antagonists. Instead, they can be understood as expressions of the authors' "anxiety and rage" (78), which stem from the feeling of being confined. This sense of confinement is associated not only with being incarcerated in mental asylums but is understood by female characters to come from residing in a house as well, which shall be addressed shortly.

The female authors of the 19th century were more often than not either "imprisoned in their homes; their father's houses" (Gilbert and Gubar 83) or confined to a house owned by a man, in some way or another. The authors' anxieties connected to feeling trapped, Gilbert and Gubar claim, transcend the genre of the female Gothic and are omnipresent throughout the whole scope of the female literary tradition of the 19th as well as the 20th century. Contributing their uneasiness to both their work in the male world of literature and the overall position of women in society, Gilbert and Gubar deem it unsurprising that the works of female authors could be characterised by "spatial imagery of enclosure and escape" (83).

Yet, it is in the Female Gothic genre the theme of confinement is most prominent. Gilbert and Gubar understand Moers' Female Gothic as a Gothic genre where "heroines (...) inhabit[ing] mysteriously intricate or uncomfortably stifling houses are often seen as

[3] The title of the monograph alludes to the character of Bertha Rochester from *Jane Eyre* (1847) written by Charlotte Brontë.

captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive" (83). In her essay "A Woman's Place" (2016) Diana Wallace suggests that the Gothic mode most clearly expresses the terror that stems from the domestic spaces and is felt most acutely by its female inhabitants. Gilbert and Gubar also connect the idea of the house as the only acceptable space for women with female authorship anxieties. The two, the authors believe, result in what they describe as "[d]ramatizations of imprisonment and escape" which use "houses as primary symbols of female imprisonment" (Gilbert and Gubar 85).

Furthermore, the authors accentuate the usage of the house imagery in regards to female body and motherhood. As the delivery of a child used to be called confinement, Gilbert and Gubar imply that the pregnancy might for some resemble incarceration in "a house or prison" (89). Noting the womb is and has always been considered to be "a child's first and most satisfying house" (88), women are often perceived as objects whose main function is to give birth and "be owned by a man" (88). This dehumanising viewpoint, Gilbert and Gubar believe, only adds to a woman writer's anxiety about being trapped by gender expectations which in turn is reflected in her writing. What is more, the authors stipulate a woman who sees herself through the metaphor of the house makes her view her self-worth based solely on her ability to bear children, reduced to a reproductive function.

The affinity of childbirth, entrapment and anxieties connected to female authorship was portrayed in a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) in which she criticises male domination over females in medical spaces. In the story, the narrator, who "is suffering from a severe post-partum [*sic*] psychosis", (Gilbert and Gubar 89) is advised and ordered a bed rest by her physician husband. Forbidden to write at all, the patient does not recover; on the contrary, her mental state rapidly deteriorates (89). Alas, confined in the top-floor room that the narrator thinks used to be a nursery, the patient is deprived of her pre-labour life only to stare into a wall covered in the yellow wallpaper. It is this gender-neutral yellow that casts shadows, seems to swirl or evokes prison bars that pull the narrator into the state her husband sees as madness while she believes it to be tension that can only be released by tearing the wallpaper of the walls for hours until there are no *other* women trapped in the house

(Gilman and Gubar 89). Gilman's short story became a widely read and referenced piece of writing which Gilbert and Gubar claim to be "a paradigmatic tale which (…) seems to tell *the* story that all literary women would tell if they could speak" (89 original emphasis). Gilbert and Gubar, therefore, consider the affinity between the Female Gothic and the image of the house as the means of expressing female dissatisfactions in a patriarchal society.

The subchapters above have presented two conceptions of the Female Gothic. The first concept presented was Anne William's dichotomy of Female and Male Gothic which stems from different narrative techniques employed in Gothic novels, particularly the form of narration, the stance toward the supernatural, and the plot. The second theory of Female Gothic, as established by Ellen Moers, bases its primary criteria on the gender of the author and the presence of the motifs of female plight, indoor and domestic setting, the trope of the house and overt male domination connected to images of insanity. In the next and final subchapter of the Theoretical Part, the work of Sarah Waters, her relationship toward Gothic fiction and inspirations behind her two novels will be presented.

2.4 About the Author

Sarah Waters is a contemporary British writer who is known for historical fiction. Waters read English literature at the University of Kent and attained a Ph.D. in English Literature. While finishing her dissertation titled *Wolfskins and Togas: Lesbian and Gay Historical Fictions, 1870 to the Present* (1995), Waters became fascinated by the lesbian Victorian sub-culture which prompted her to want to write lesbian historical fiction (Rennison 145). In 1998, she published her debut novel *Tipping the Velvet* which depicts a picturesque tale of a young girl, Nan Astley, tangled in the world of male impersonators, lesbians and corrupted London streets in the 1890s. The story is not dissimilar to *Moll Flanders* (1722) by Daniel Defoe or *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) by Henry Fielding or even *David Copperfield* (1850) by Charles Dickens (Rennison 145) Following the tremendous success of her first novel, the author published another two set in Victorian England, *Affinity* (1999), the story taking place predominantly in the female section of Millbank prison, and *Fingersmith* (2002) which is a variation on a sensation

novel[4]. Her subsequent novels all are set in the twentieth century, *The Night Watch* (2004) and *The Little Stranger* (2009) taking place during and after the World War 2 respectively, while her as of now the last novel *The Paying Guests* (2014) depicts the time of the 1920s.

Over the course of her career, her work has won numerous awards including the Betty Task Award or Somerset Maugham Award and her name has been mentioned in multiple anthologies. The time periods Waters' novels are set in are always heavily researched by the author and her books are influenced by the works of various writers. Gothic literature bears a certain allure to the author, as she admits in an interview for Virago Press, saying that she has been charmed by "the macabre and supernatural" (Tuttle 5x) ever since being a little girl. To elucidate some of the Gothic inspirations behind *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*, the following subchapter is due.

2.4.1 Inspirations Behind *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger*

The author's third novel, *Fingersmith*, reaps the most praise and marks the end of what some call her loosely connected Neo-Victorian novel trilogy. In an interview for *The Guardian* in 2002, Waters let it be known that her third book was intended to be "a pastiche of the whole sensation genre" ("Hot Waters"). In her 2006 article "Sensational Stories" for the same newspaper, Waters uncovers further inspirations behind her third novel, saying "[o]ften, when I'm asked about the writing of [*Fingersmith*], I say that I used the book as a way of mopping up the various juicy 19th-century titbits I hadn't been able to fit into my first two novels[5]; and I'm only half joking (sic)" ("Sensational Stories"). In the article, Waters reiterates her previous statement, admitting that she let herself write about topics from the Victorian culture that intrigued her the most, particularly "asylums, pornography, bibliophilia, the world of servants, the world of thieves" ("Sensational Stories"). Furthermore, Waters declares that *Fingersmith* was inspired by sensation novels "such as Wilkie Collins, Sheridan LeFanu and Mary Elizabeth Braddon" ("Sensational Stories") for their employment of the tropes of family drama, sex and crime which made

[4] Sensation novels, "usually considered a subgenre of the Gothic" (Tuttle 5w), became very popular in the 1860s. Their authors used melodramatic elements in their stories and drew inspiration from court cases from their time (5w). The two authors who originated the genre of sensation novels are Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Snodgrass 60).

[5] *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and *Affinity* (1999)

them extremely popular during their time. In the article, the author directly refers to LeFanu’s *Uncle Silas* (1864) and *The Rose and the Key* (1871) as the inspiration behind Maud’s name and alludes to Braddon’s *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) as well. The echoes of Collins most widely-read novel, *The Woman in White* (1859), are easily traceable and readily confirmed by the author as her primary inspiration (“Sensational Stories”). The first clear resemblance between the two novels lays in the multiple narrators who add to the suspense as well as the mystery around what is left unsaid. Collins’ story is told by many different narrators, varying from some of the characters to a tombstone. Similarly, Waters' gripping novel is told by two narrators, Sue and Maud. Mental asylums, women helplessly confined to secluded mansions, suitors with sinister monetary motifs and family secrets connect these two novels.

The Little Stranger, on the other hand, does not take place in Victorian England but instead paints a picture of England after the end of the Second World War. Depicting the steady decline of a post-war upper-middle-class family, the novel gently alludes to many books considered to be a part of the Gothic tradition. The inspirations include but are not limited to *Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, a spine-chilling “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe (1839), *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by Henry James, *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier (Topolovská 140) and “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

During the interview hosted by Caroline Beck for the Durham Book Festival in 2018, Waters talks about the origin of *The Little Stranger*. As she was conducting the research for her previous novel, *The Night Watch*, the issue of class which interested the author would frequently appear. After the war, many changes in the class distribution of the English society took place which is captured in *The Franchise Affair* (1948) by Josephine Tey. Tey’s inspiration to write the novel was an 18th-century case of a girl who claimed to be kidnapped by two middle-class women. Waters claims the piece was “quite unpleasant” (Waters, “An Evening with Sarah Waters, Chaired by Caroline Beck” 00:15:38) to read due to the sense of loathing toward middle-class people (00:14:30-00:16:20). Waters was initially thinking of rewriting the story from the point of view of the kidnapped girl (“An evening with Sarah Waters, Chaired by Caroline Beck” 00:16:20-

00:16:25; McCrum), Betty, however, after few months decided to shift the focus and make Dr Faraday the narrator. The crucial decision to make the novel be a ghost story came to Waters after having a terrible nightmare about someone standing by the side of her bed which made her think that telling the story of class tensions through the mystery of a ghost would be a good idea (00:16:25-00:17:40).

3 Practical Part

Having presented the theoretical background of the two concepts of Female Gothic, the impending practical part will apply the findings of the theoretical part on two novels by Sarah Waters. In the following chapters, the novels will be interpreted through the Female and Male Gothic dichotomy, which focuses on the narrator, the degree to which the supernatural phenomena are explained and the conclusion of the plot. In order to retain clarity, a synopsis of each novel will precede the interpretation itself. Secondly, the novels *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger* will be looked at from the perspective of Moers' theory, paying special attention to setting. Moers' subcategorization deems indoor setting in connection to confinement of female characters crucial to Female Gothic. Therefore, the main subjects of the second half of the Practical Part will be houses and madhouses. Applying Moers' theory to these spaces and the feelings they evoke, the Practical Part will determine whether the novels might be considered Female Gothic fictions.

3.1 The Two Novel's Through Two Gothic Modes

For the last and final part of the Practical Part, the two novels will be inspected through the prism of Anne Williams' dichotomy of Gothic modes to test whether two novels by the same author can be written in different modes. Williams determines three criteria for distinguishing each mode. The criteria are the narrator, the attitude toward the supernatural and the conclusion of the plot. As Waters' novels are quite different from each other, in the next part, the narrators, the supernatural and the plots will be compared and decided upon whether they fit Williams' Gothic modes. Firstly, for the sake of clarity, a synopsis of each novel will be provided and followed by the analyses that determine what mode the novel would correspond with.

3.1.1 The Synopsis and Interpretation of *Fingersmith*

The novel tells a story of two young women, Sue and Maud, who are the narrators. It commences with Sue's narration, a story of an orphaned thief, living in the slum part of London, Lant Street in Borough, who accepts an offer to play accomplice to the seduction of a wealthy heiress into a marriage with a fellow thief, Richard Rivers, who will then have his newlywed bride incarcerated in a lunatic asylum and walk away with her money. Sue is

to pose as a maid and help manipulate the naïve Maud into an inconvenient marriage. However, what starts as a straightforward plan quickly transforms into a complex dark story of betrayals and unexpected twists. For when Maud is to be admitted into the madhouse, it is not the wealthy girl the doctors confine inside the institution, but Sue.

The twist Sue did not see coming is followed by Maud's narration which traces the events Sue already presented from Maud's point of view, for Maud knew about Richard and Sue's plan all along and was willing to entrap the young thief so Maud could be freed of her uncle, who is her legal guardian, and his house filled with books. Therefore, with Sue being locked in the madhouse in Maud's name, Maud is convinced she is finally free and that a luxury house awaits her in London. Alas, the girl is manipulated and betrayed once more when instead of keeping his word, Richard brings Maud to Lant Street. There she is held against her will by Mrs Sucksby, who reveals that she used to know Maud's mother and that the plan of getting Maud away from her uncle was originally thought of by her. Additionally, a few days later, everything that Maud knows to be true is shaken once more as Mrs Sucksby shocks her by admitting that Maud is not a daughter of Marianne Lilly but Mrs Sucksby herself.

The third part of the novel is told from Sue's perspective and commences right after she has been admitted to a madhouse. After a few weeks of her confinement, she manages to escape with help from William, a former servant at Briar, and together they travel to Lant Street where Sue is astonished to find Maud. The latter has literary taken Sue's place at the table. Furious with anger, Sue storms into the thieves' kitchen and threatens to hurt Maud. In walks Richard and amongst the confusion it is him who gets stabbed and bleeds to death. It is not very clear who killed him, and Mrs Sucksby decides to take the blame and is later hanged. Sue then discovers a letter describing how she is the true daughter of Marianne Lilly and rushes to find Maud who she supposes has returned to her uncle's home, Briar. Indeed, Sue and Maud are reunited at Briar and confess their love for each other.

As mentioned before, the love story is told through the perspective of two narrators, each a young girl with limited knowledge. Multiple narrators are not a feature of Female Gothic. However, it might be argued that the limited points of view of both narrators and

their inside input as protagonists would be closer to Female Gothic rather than Male Gothic mode.

The novel does not feature many supernatural elements in the sense that there would be spectres haunting someone or something. There is one incident when Sue thinks she sees a ghost which she shortly after realises was only a dress sticking out of a wardrobe and fluttering in a draught. Moreover, as the book is a direct homage to sensational novels, the fantastical coincidences of fortune are replete there, i.e. the two girls' fates being intertwined since they were babies, William happening to visit the madhouse and be able to help Sue escape it, and the chaotic killing of Richard Rivers. All are more or less given a feasible, even if quite far-fetched, explanation. As there are hardly any supernatural elements and the mysteries concerning mainly Sue's and Maud's mothers are elucidated by the end of the novel, it might be concluded that it belongs to the Female Gothic mode.

The conclusion to the plot might be considered a happy ending, for Richard Rivers who was willing to betray Sue and marry Maud for monetary purposes, and the main plotter of the cunning plan, Mrs Sucksby, are both dead. Albeit not getting married to a man, both heroines find affection for each other and stay at Briar with the promise of better days ahead and therefore fulfil the definite and hopeful ending Williams' ascribes to the Female Gothic mode. To summarise, the three criteria all to a certain extend indicate that, according to Anne Williams' theory, *Fingersmith* represents a novel written in Female Gothic mode.

3.1.2 The Synopsis and Interpretation of *The Little Stranger*

It is a few years after World War Two and a local doctor, Dr Faraday is called to treat a maidservant at Hundreds Hall, a house of the local gentry family the Ayres. Consequently, Faraday, whose name we are never told, befriends the secluded family and visits them frequently. Through his eyes, the reader observes a series of misfortunes that happen in the house and gradually bring the family to their demise.

Firstly, the family dog, Gyp, attacks a child during a party, leaving the little girl with a nasty cut on her lip and cheek. After that, the Ayres are made to euthanise the otherwise harmless old dog with the help of Faraday. The doctor is then sought out by the son of the family, Roderick, who first tells the doctor about the evil spirit or

the “infection” (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 165) the house spreads onto its inhabitants and makes them do horrible things. Faraday, however, ascribes Rod’s account to delayed shell-shock which only supports his latter explanation of a fire set to Roderick’s room a few days later. Roderick’s adamant claims that there is something that wants to hurt the family are further dismissed by Faraday and his doctor colleagues, and Roderick is consequently sent away to a mental institution.

With the Lord of the manor gone, Faraday feels a compelling need to be close to the women remaining at the Hall. Which is why he is the first person to know about the strange things the women experience, such as the tapping sounds coming from the walls or scratches on the wood panelling for which the women in the house have no explanation. Dr Faraday is, however, swift to dismiss the events as wild imaginations of the young maid Betty or senile fancies of Mrs Ayres. During that time, Faraday also quite unexpectedly becomes infatuated with Caroline and pushes her into an engagement with him. Meanwhile, with the house almost empty, Mrs Ayres spends her days musing about her past and becomes convinced that the mysterious noises and scratchings coming out of an old nursery speaking tube are created by her dead daughter Susan who had died years before her other children were born. Her beliefs grow into such proportions that she is convinced her daughter is calling her and eventually hangs herself on a doorknob in her room.

At that point, even Caroline starts to believe that there is a sort of spirit roaming the Hall and is resolute in calling off the engagement with Faraday, selling the house and moving away. Alas, after parting ways with Faraday and finding a buyer for the house, her body is located lying in a nightgown beneath the two-story landing. Faraday is asked his medical opinion and after an affirmative answer her death is accounted for as a suicide. From then on, Hundreds Hall stays empty, and its dark rooms remind the narrator of the murky months he spent there.

The homodiegetic narrator[6], in this case, is limited to his point of view and would indicate it belongs to the Female Gothic mode. One cannot help but notice that, albeit

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[6] Homodiegetic narrator is a part of the story they are narrating.

being part of the action, the narrator is hardly ever present whenever the incidents menacing the members of the household occur and has to rely on other people's accounts which he then tries to rationalise. As he is never the one who would be in danger but the one hearing and thinking about other people in distress, it makes him a kind of stranger who only observes the suffering of others. Therefore, his perspective, as of someone from the outside looking in, would indicate the narrator being more indicative of Male Gothic, despite not using multiple points of view.

The supernatural elements of the novel are easily traceable but cannot be easily described. There are many small things that happen at Hundreds Hall that Betty, the housemaid, thinks are doings of a "ghost" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 484), Roderick describes as a spreading "infection" and "a sly spiteful child" (165), Mrs Ayres insists might be her dead daughter communicating with her (391-3) while Caroline believes there is "a poltergeist" (364), an evil part of her brother's mind, haunting the house. The many theories as to what haunts the Hall are all dismissed by the narrator, a sceptical man of science. Subsequently, with two women dead and one man incarcerated in a mental institution for the rest of his life, the incidents cease to happen and never occur again leaving the readers without a sound explanation of their origin. The uncertainty surrounding the thing or the person menacing the inhabitants of the house suggests the narrative belongs to the Male Gothic mode.

The novel tells a story of a decline of a gentry family; and the conclusion is not exactly cheerful either. After Roderick is taken care of in the asylum, Mrs Ayres and Caroline are dead; Betty is not deemed a credible witness during the court hearing and eventually finds work in a local factory. On the edges of the estate, the parts of the land the Ayres sold to the city council, dozens of community houses are built, but Hundreds Hall remains empty. To summarize, viewing the novel through Williams' theory of Gothic modes, *The Little Stranger* may be considered a representative of Male Gothic.

3.2 Ellen Moers' Concept of Female Gothic

3.2.1 *Fingersmith*

The two main protagonists and narrators of Waters' third and most well-known novel are Susan and Maud, who are each in turn confined in various houses against their own will. The three subsequent subchapters will discuss two houses and a madhouse, Mrs Sucksby's house in Lant Street and Briar, the house in the English countryside owned by Mr Lilly, and how the places contributed to the female protagonists' feeling of confinement. Lastly, the madhouses the girls spend some time in will be paid attention to, since they represent a different thing for each protagonist.

3.2.1.1 The House in Lant Street

The first house the reader is presented with is the household of Mrs Sucksby and Mr Ibbs in Land Street, Borough. The house is divided into two parts, the front of the house is a locksmith shop which is connected to the rest of the house with a hallway behind "a green baize curtain" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 8) behind a counter. In that way, the house is divided into the front of the house and the back of the house. The divide is important, because from the street, it allows for the place to present as a reputable place despite of what happens in the back. Similarly, many elements of the novel are not what they seem to be at first glance. The back of the house consists of few upstairs rooms; however, it is in the kitchen that the inhabitants make do by melting down cups and cutlery to reshape it into something completely new. "Everything that came into [their] kitchen looking like one sort of thing, was made to leave it again looking quite another" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 10). The people living in the household make a living by buying and re-selling stolen goods, and therefore think of themselves as "[h]onest thieves" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 315), and by running a baby farm business by Mrs Sucksby on the side. Sue has lived there all her life and is very fond of the place. Even after having been long gone, she still thinks of it as home.

For Maud, Lant Street is anything but home. Expecting to be staying in a London city house she is baffled and later horrified when Richard leads her to Mrs Sucksby's

house. In Maud’s eyes, the kitchen Susan relished her moments in is “small, and windowless, dark and unwholesome, and shockingly hot” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 311). After being held there for several weeks, Maud briefly escapes the house and walks through London streets in search for help. While walking through the city, she has never visited before she recognises St Paul’s cathedral and is able to gather her bearings, for she “know[s] it from illustrations” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 370). The two protagonists hold different views, Sue views it as home and safe space which because she grew up surrounded by thieves and stolen good and therefore feels comfortable whereas Maud spent her childhood in a madhouse and later in her uncle’s house where she was sheltered from the world that did not revolve around books. Their different perceptions therefore indicate their different upbringing.

3.2.1.2 Briar

Briar is a grand old house in the English countryside, first introduced to the reader as “a damnable place: two hundred years old, and dark, and draughty” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 24). Susan Trinder is to enter the house as a lady’s maid, earn her trust, beguile the naïve mistress of the house into marrying Richard Rivers and get paid for her complicity in a heinous crime. Her first impression of her new temporary home is shutter-worthy for she arrives at the house during the night and sees it “rising vast and straight and stark out of the woolly fog, with all its windows black or shuttered and its walls with a dead kind of ivy clinging to them, and a couple of its chimneys sending up threads of a feeble-looking smoke – here was Briar” (Waters, *Fingersmith* 57). The next day, the house appears as glum as the day before, isolated by trees, standing still and quiet. A servant tells Sue it is that way because Mr Lilly is not fond of noise and his niece has a set of weak nerves that are easily ruffled by loud sounds. The same servant also reminds Sue of a matron in jail by the way she carries a set of keys on herself at all times. However, Sue determines that she would far more prefer to be locked in prison than to stay at Briar, for the silence is unbearable (Waters, *Fingersmith* 61). Nevertheless, the silence that spreads through the abode is interrupted twice an hour by the strike of the big clock but apart from that the household stays completely silent which makes Sue think the time passes more slowly than it would elsewhere (Waters, *Fingersmith* 90). Missing her home

in Lant Street, Sue increasingly grows to dread the place where "the sun never shines" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 68) clearly, and people are not allowed outside freely. Sue misses Mrs Sucksby's kitchen and the diverse characters she would meet there, thieves who would visit the house with stolen goods or old friends coming for dinner. The orderliness of the days and boredom she experiences at Briar further contrast her life in London where the household had to be always cautious of police approaching.

Maud, first enters Briar, after her uncle has brought her home from the madhouse she grew up in. When she first lays her eyes on Briar at the age of eleven, Maud shares Sue's initial sentiments. Even though she is accustomed to the sombre decor of the madhouse, the solitariness does not strike her as odd. It is the "stillness" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 183) the house is encapsulated in that petrifies the girl. Over time, the "strangeness of Briar – (…) the silence, the stillness, the turning passages and cluttered walls" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 231) further contribute to her feeling of confinement. Ever since being a girl, Maud had been watched and raised by Mrs Stiles who does not shy away from resorting to punishments, "one fiercer than the last" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 192) to tame the lively girl. The punishments include Maud being tied up by rope or locked in dark, cold rooms for hours. Therefore, it is quite fitting that Maud, not unlike Sue, usually compares herself to "a prisoner" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 263); and Briar to a prison she wishes to escape from saying, for instance: "How hard I have gazed at the walls of my uncle's estate, wishing they may part and release me!" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 263). Another reason why Maud compares Briar to prison is the striking of the big clock that controls the daily life at Briar (Waters, *Fingersmith* 185; 208). Furthermore, other aspects of Maud's life are under a surveillance and strict orders, as Mr Lilly, Maud's uncle, decides how she dresses (Waters, *Fingersmith* 101-2; 183) and ensures Maud does not leave the house or the adjacent park grounds (218).

3.2.1.3 Madhouses

As mentioned above, Maud spent the first eleven years of her life in a madhouse where she was taken care of by the nurses. Not knowing anything else, the memories Maud made in the madhouse were connected to feelings of security and love. Those memories, however, faded and the image of the madhouse came to be used as a threat Maud's uncle

frequently used to scare her into obedience, mussing: "Perhaps you wish that I had left you at the madhouse, all those years ago (…) but perhaps you would rather dwell among lunatics, than among books? Hmm?" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 245). Even though Maud is no longer incarcerated in a mental institution, the idea of a madhouse and madness influences her behaviour. Because Maud is repeatedly told about her mother who died in a madhouse, the girl eventually contemplates whether she has inherited her mother's illness (Waters, *Fingersmith* 220). Therefore, images of insanity are intrinsically used against her by male characters, be it her uncle (Waters, *Fingersmith* 245) or Richard (269).

Sue, on the other hand, is mercilessly held in captivity. Just when she can almost see her complicity in the swindle coming to an end, Sue finds herself being confused for Mrs Rivers and locked inside an all-female asylum near Reading instead. The asylum is not what Susan pictured when thinking about madhouses, for it does not resemble dark dungeons of gaol but "an ordinary gentleman's house" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 408) with drab-coloured walls. The madhouse used to be a regular house and later was transformed into an institution for lunatic ladies (408). Not only is Sue incarcerated in a mental asylum despite being sane but the false testimonies provided by Richard and Maud disable her from proving she is a maidservant and not the lady the doctors deem her to be. The Doctor determines the root of her illness stems from reading too much (421). When she tries to prove she is not Mrs Rivers by telling the doctors she cannot read nor write the doctors only become more certain she is suffering from a "disease" they "call (…) a hyper-aesthetic one" (Waters, *Fingersmith* 421). Sue, therefore, possesses no means to prove them otherwise and feels trapped like "a fly (…) wrapped in the thread of a spider" (427). Admitted in against the word of Rivers, whom the doctors presume to be her husband, and the signature of two doctors, Sue learns the only way she could be released is to get the man who had her confined in to sign her out (Waters, *Fingersmith* 426). In Sue's case, the man with the power to release is Richard, for other women there, the person holding the key to their freedom might be a father or a brother (426). The power the male relatives hold over women is enormous for it is their signature that either releases the women of keeps them locked in padded rooms for years.

On a similar note, even though the doctors can diagnose the patients and order treatments, it is the female nurses that run the place. One nurse always sleeps in the same room as the incarcerated women. Overall the nurses are vile; they like to amuse themselves by bullying the patients, for example by forcing Betty into running their chores (Waters, *Fingersmith* 409) of physically and sexually harassing Maud (440- 42).

3.2.2 *The Little Stranger*

The novel marks Waters' fifth book and her first endeavour in the English country house fiction (Topolovská 140). The decadent story of the Ayres family takes place predominantly in their home, the secluded Hundreds Hall near Lidcote in Warwickshire county, and is narrated by a local doctor, Dr Faraday, who first remembers having visited the house when he was a boy.

3.2.2.1 Hundreds Hall

Hundreds Hall, or the Hundreds, as it is sometimes referred to, is a grand Georgian house inhabited by the last members of the Ayres family, Mrs Ayers and her two children, Caroline and Roderick. The 18th-century (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 25) house acts as a setting of the novel, and it might also be considered an emblem of old affluent families who were losing their position in England after World War Two. The sight of the house the narrator remembers "as an absolute mansion" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 1) from when he was a child, underwhelms him when he visits the place again after the Second World War:

> What horrified me were the signs of decay. Sections of the lovely weathered edgings seemed to have fallen completely away, so that the house's uncertain Georgian outline was even more tentative than before. Ivy had spread, then patchily died, and hung like tangled rat's-tail hair. The steps leading up to the broad front door were cracked, with weeds growing lushly up through the seams. (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 5)

It is few years after the war, in the time of class and political changes, right before the introduction of the National Health Service, the gentry family has lost nearly all its staff and wealth and is forced to gradually sell parts of the estate, such as the more distant parts of the land, to make ends meet. Selling the land does not, however, bring in sufficient income for the family to live the way they were used to in the past. Therefore, the whole house is taken care of by two maids and members of the family themselves. The sheer size of the house forces the family to seal off some of its rooms in order to save money by not having to heat the whole house.

The house and its inhabitants appear to be stuck in a time long gone, back when their social affluence was great and their house full of maids and butlers. Indeed, all family members are wont to amuse themselves with stories about various personnel from when it took a plethora of staff to keep the place impeccable. The narrator, a man from the working class, recognises the crucial part the servants have played in running the house. For now, after almost two hundred years since it was built, the house "[is] collapsing, like a pyramid of cards" (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 27) without the appropriate number of workers and care.

All three members are well aware of their situation. Caroline and Roderick are the last descendants of the old family. Roderick, who Waters presumably named after Roderick Usher, a man gone mad, who buries his twin sister alive, from the short story by Edgar Allan Poe "The Fall of the House of Usher", shares similar features with Poe's dark character. Owing to the primogeniture laws, after the death of Colonel Ayers Roderick becomes the heir of the house, despite being the youngest descendant. As stated in the Theoretical Part, Gothic fiction often comments on patriarchy in order to highlight the subordinate position of women in society. Caroline, despite being the eldest of the Ayres children, "ha[s] been brought up to lose [the Hall]" (147) due to the inheritance laws which favour male descendants over the female ones. Roderick is the lawful heir of Hundreds Hall; however, in the eyes of the people around him, the war veteran is hardly considered capable of running the house. His family and acquaintances produce numerous excuses for Rod's shortcomings, mainly ascribing them to his poor physical and mental health. Rod starts to blame the house and a mischievous bad spirit inside that moves

objects and leaves scorches on the walls and the ceiling of Rod’s room for the family’s misfortunes. Moreover, he starts to fear for his family’s safety in the house. Indeed, a few nights later, a part of the estate is set on fire which triggers a rapid deterioration of Rod’s mental state. After that Dr Faraday is aptly quick to arrange Rod's transfer to a mental institution, efficiently moving Roderick from one place which he felt isolated in, to another, and removing him from the rest of his family. The doctor’s swift arrangement of Rod’s transfer is triggered by Faraday’s visit to Hundreds Hall the day after the fire. The doctor is shocked that Roderick is willingly locked inside one of the small rooms in the house and insists that Rod is sent away. Faraday, however, does not repeat his practise again later, when Mrs Ayres’s mental state corrodes. The different approach to the two very similar cases of mental breakdown implies that Faraday put a man’s wellbeing above a woman’s.

Roderick’s mother, Mrs Ayres, saddened by her son’s poor state and spooked by strange incidents in the house, i.e. scratchings on the wood panelling, queer knocking noises coming from the wall or crackling inside of the only nursery telephone. When Mrs Ayres’ nerves begin to inevitably falter and decline, she is woken up one night by the sound of what she thinks is a bird trapped in her dressing room. Assuming the bird has got into the room through an unused chimney and is now trapped in the house, the elderly lady opens the door to the room only to find it empty (Waters, *The Little Stranger* 305-306). Asking whether there ever really was a bird frantically trying to escape the room is inapt. However, a bird in the house[7] is believed to predict bad luck and even death in a family that lives there. In this case, the bird might serve as a foreshadowing, which is a device used plentifully in Gothic fiction, of Mrs Ayres’s death that follows not long after the incident.

After her brother is confined inside a mental institution from which he may never be released after suffering a mental breakdown, and her mother hangs herself after hearing her dead daughter Susan calling her, Caroline deems it necessary to sell the property and

[7] “A Bird in the House” is also a short story that features a bird symbolism as a foreshadowing of death in a household as well as the title of a collection of short stories (1970) written by Margaret Laurence.

leave. This understandable and sensible decision is, however, met with sharp disapproval from the narrator who, at that point, intends to marry Caroline, despite never discussing it with her in depth. Caroline initially agrees to marry Faraday and hopes that through the marriage to the older man, she might be presented with an opportunity to leave Hundreds Hall. As for Faraday, he fancies the idea of becoming the man of the house and is not willing to hear Caroline's fears and struggles connected to the property.

4 Conclusion

Alongside the obvious aspects, such as amusement and inherent fright, Gothic fiction enables female authors to express feelings of dissatisfaction with the society they live in (Wallace and Smith 2). A term has been coined for literature written in a Gothic mode that expresses unique experiences by women through Gothic literature, the Female Gothic. Ellen Moers defined it in 1976 as a category for all works produced in a Gothic mode by female authors, therefore, deeming the gender of the author decisive. However, throughout the years, the usage of the term has changed and evolved. One of the modifications of the meaning of the term was done by Anne Williams, who claims that Female Gothics do not necessarily need to be written by female authors. Williams views Female Gothic as one half of a pair of Gothic modes, Female and Male that are distinguished mainly by their narrative devices.

The two concepts of Female Gothics sparked an idea whether two novels by the same author could, therefore, be deemed Female Gothic by Moers' gendered criterium as well as be understood as representatives of both Gothic modes according to Williams. Subsequently, I composed two hypotheses which I built my thesis around in order to explore the notions.

Given the findings of literary criticism, the theoretical part firstly introduced the beginnings of Gothic literature and its quintessential tropes, such as sombre settings, mysterious enigmas, secluded sites, feeling of fearful apprehension, polarised good and evil characters, melodrama, foreboding and suggested or explicit horror (Childs 172). Consequently, the two concepts of Female Gothic are elaborated on, and Sarah Waters and her inspirations behind the two novels are paid attention to as well.

The first theory presented was Anne Williams' dichotomy of Gothic modes, articulated in *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. Williams set three criteria which enable her to distinguish between Female and Male Gothics. The three criteria are the narrator, the degree in which supernatural elements are explained and the conclusion of the plot. The Female Gothic employs the first-person narrator, typically the heroine herself, to create suspense, the supernatural elements are usually explained as having originated in human activity. The narrative usually resolves on a happy note, predictably with

the heroine either getting married or falling in love. The Male Gothic, on the other hand, achieves suspense through the employment of multiple narrators; multiple points of view. The supernatural elements are typically accepted as part of the reality or left unexplained, and the story is usually a tragic one, with the main character failing in some way or dying.

The theoretical layout of Williams theory allowed for the interpretation of Waters' two novels in the Practical part. Two out of the three criteria were resolutely confirmed in both novels. In *Fingersmith*, for the little supernatural elements and concerning Sue's and Maud's birth mothers were eventually explained and the novel ended somewhat happily. The villains, namely Richard, who betrayed both of the protagonists, and Mrs Sucksby, who was the plotter of the swindle, both died, and the protagonists reunited and confessed love for each other. The type of narrator that is double first-person narration is not typically considered a feature of Female Gothic mode; however, as both the narrators were the protagonists whose view was very limited, it can still be viewed as Female Gothic mode.

Conversely, in *The Little Stranger*, the mysterious thing haunting Hundreds Hall is never explained, despite the several guesses made by the residents of the Hall. In that way, the reader can indeed never be sure what the source of the strange little incidents in the house is. Corresponding to Williams' characterisation of the Male Gothic mode, the ending of the story is a tragic one, for all members of the Ayres family cease to exist within the borders of the estate. While Rod, the son and the heir of the estate, suffers a nervous collapse and is transported into a mental facility, the female members of the family, namely Mrs Ayres and Caroline, both die in the house. Even the narrator, a local doctor, does feel a sense of failing, when the house he would frequently visit, remains unoccupied and decays. The only element that differs from William's description of Male Gothic is the narrator, for *The Little Stranger* is narrated by a first-person narrator, and that is Dr Faraday, a stranger who befriends the family and watches from afar their inevitable demise. Faraday is a limited unreliable narrator and should, therefore, be considered to be closer to the Female Gothic mode. However, since he is a stranger who sometimes observes the suffering of others and does not invite the reader to sympathise with those who suffer, the novel could be considered as a type of Male Gothic.

The second concept of Female Gothic is the Female Gothic defined by Ellen Moers in *Women Writers*. Moers stipulates the gender of the author as a primary prerequisite for the work to be considered a Female Gothic. Secondly, the author puts forward that the setting of Female Gothic novels is essential for its depiction of travel and the fact that in many Gothic novels, the only space female characters can independently move about is indoors, mainly in houses. Thirdly, Moers writes about the affinity between indoor spaces and images of madness Female Gothic literature is replete with. The theme of madness in connection to the house is further elaborated on using insights by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar from their study of 19th-century female writing, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.*

Sarah Waters' novels being works written by a female author should, according to Moers, make them a part of Female Gothic literary tradition and are subsequently treated as such, for the indoor settings in connection to a female sense of confinement and images of insanity are analysed in both novels. Put into order according to the surrounding each novel is set in, the Theoretical Part focuses on the house in Lant Street, Briar, madhouses and Hundreds Hall and how the individual loci contribute to the feeling of confinement in female characters. For Sue, on the one hand, Lant Street is the only place she has ever known as home and is also a place where people know about the way her mother died, hanged on the square for murder, and therefore see Sue as a promising criminal herself which makes Sue feels pigeonholed and limited to their perception of her. The house in Lant Street is the place where Maud feels confined, primarily because she is held there against her own will after Richard does not keep his word and brings her there. Seeing the place as a den full of criminals, Maud tries to escape, only to return a few hours later, for she has no other place to go to. Briar, an enormous manor in the English countryside, makes both protagonists feel confined. Sue feels responsibility for finishing the job she has come there to do while being conflicted for how she would hurt Maud in the process. Furthermore, the seclusion of the house and its strict daily regime and stillness attribute to Sue feeling like she is in prison. Maud, similarly to Sue, feels imprisoned in her uncle's house mainly because ever since her arrival at Briar, she has not left. With her day being controlled by the strike of a clock in a tower, Maud also feels like Briar is rather a prison than her home. Madhouses, in which the protagonists of *Fingersmith* have spent some

time in. A madhouse, although Maud and Sue each stayed in a different one, poses as crucial trigger for both. Sue is incarcerated in an asylum after Richard signs her in. Despite being completely sane, the protagonist is not believed by the male doctors and could only be released if Richard consented. Even though she eventually escapes the madhouse, her stay there, at times, makes her doubt her sanity. Maud's connection to a madhouse reaches far into her early childhood, for she spent the first decade of her life there. Despite remembering her stay positively, the fact that her mother was allegedly mad is enough for Maud to fear slipping into insanity herself and is therefore highly sensitive to any comment about her sanity faltering.

The last locus the Practical Part focused on was Hundreds Hall, the haunted house in *The Little Stranger*. The Hundreds is an isolated house. Its inhabitants, the Ayres family and their maid, Betty, are secluded from the rest of the world and feel confined. The most attention is paid to the Ayreses. Rod feels responsible for his family and the estate, refuses to leave the house, and eventually suffers a hysteric episode after which he is sent to a mental institution. His mother, limited by her class position in the world in which the affluence of the higher classes weakens, holds in her head onto the past and copes with the trauma of her son's collapse by seeing and hearing her dead daughter. Settled inside her own delusions, the mother of the family first unsuccessfully cuts her wrists with broken glass and later commits suicide. Lastly, Caroline, the daughter, makes the sensible decision to sell the family house in order not to lose any more money only to be met with discouragement. Being a young and smart woman, she is aware of her position as a spinster and for some time even agrees to marry a local doctor, however, after she denounces their engagement after few weeks and then is found dead few days later. Her decision to not marry the man is later used as one of the arguments for why she could not be sane in the first place and therefore supports a convenient explanation for her death, which is a suicide. This example shines light onto the way men might use the idea of madness as an explanation for female behaviour that does not profit a man which is one of the elements Moers highlights.

In conclusion, my first hypothesis whether Waters' novels could be considered Female Gothics as understood by Moers has been proved correct. In both novels,

the female characters felt the sense of confinement that originated from their habitat and images of mental illness were used against them. My second hypothesis estimated that *Fingersmith* and *The Little Stranger* were not written in the same Gothic mode. The hypothesis was confirmed too, *Fingersmith* can, according to Williams' system, be considered Female Gothic and *The Little Stranger* can be viewed as Male Gothic. Nevertheless, it should not be omitted that in *The Little Stranger* one of the three criteria, the narrator, is rather ambiguous, and can be argued to belong to either of the Gothic modes. The application of William's theory to *The Little Stranger* demonstrates that it is quite limited. Therefore, it is only a means for further learning, and as such constituted a great device that assisted me in my interpretation, however, it ought not to be taken absolutely.

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