

## **Thesis abstract**

This thesis will focus on the ways in which the transformations in nineteenth-century Gothic stories mirror the gradual changes in the Victorian society's notions about perception and about the metaphysical. The nineteenth century marks a time when advances in science made it clear that not seeing something does not mean that it does not exist, and when psychologists made it clear that seeing something does not necessarily mean it does exist. Moreover, the nineteenth century was a time when religious notions that were previously accepted without question started to be doubted. When people lost their faith in the unseen and at the same time became aware that their eyes are not sufficient to see everything and that their mind may play tricks on them, the notion of reality was increasingly problematized, which is made especially clear in the genre of the Gothic.

It could be argued that while the basic tropes of the Gothic remain more or less the same; however, the way they are used, the reactions of the protagonists as well as the general outlook of the story are problematized by newly introduced ideas about vision and human mind. It could be said that in many cases there is no longer a clear boundary between the protagonist and the 'other' of the story, which can often be interpreted as an aspect of the protagonist himself, a part of his mind that comes to haunt him. Therefore in many stories the main protagonist may not be the innocent victim and the 'other' is not necessarily an outside threat but rather the evil within the character of the protagonist himself. Moreover, the confusion of the protagonists who witness something supernatural reflects the conflict between the dominant Victorian notions of "seeing is believing" on the one hand and the concept of the "fundamentally subjective character of human vision" on the other. The social and cultural context is thus reflected not only in the depiction and role of the ghost, but, perhaps most importantly, in the behaviour of the character who encounters it. It is therefore worth considering that the main

conflict of the story may no longer be between objectively perceived supernatural evil and the characters, but rather between warring notions about vision and reality in the mind itself, the uncertainty of how to react often resulting in characters' attempts to incorporate the unexplainable and the supernatural into the well-known rational framework of medicine or psychology.