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## CONTENT

INTRODUCTION .....	4
<b>CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF GOTHIC FICTION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. The emergence and development of the Gothic fantasy genre .....	9
1.2. Characteristic features and motifs of Gothic fiction .....	16
1.3. Modern Gothic fiction: influence on the literary process .....	29
CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 1	
<b>CHAPTER 2 GOTHIC FANTASY POETICS IN THE NOVEL “HOUSE OF SALT AND SORROWS” BY ERIN CRAIG.....</b>	<b>38</b>
2.1. Plot and characters as the embodiment of Gothic archetypes.....	38
2.2. Space and atmosphere of the novel: symbolism and functions.....	53
2.3 The relationship between folklore and the supernatural in the novel.....	61
2.4. Duality of Reality and Fantasy as a Feature of Gothic Fantasy in the Novel.....	70
CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 2	
CONCLUSIONS.....	79
SUMMARY .....	81
PE3HOME .....	83
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>86</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Gothic fiction has always been an important tool for exploring human fears, anxieties, and hidden desires. It covers topics such as death, loneliness, the supernatural, and hidden threats, which add depth to the genre and make it more than just entertainment. In today's society, which is experiencing social and technological changes, the Gothic takes on a new meaning, helping readers to comprehend their own fears of the unknown.

One of the contemporary novels that skillfully uses Gothic motifs, combines a fantasy atmosphere with elements of horror and mystery is *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig. Under the outer shell of the fairy tale story, classic Gothic themes are hidden: isolation, ghosts of the past, unexplained deaths that cause anxiety in both characters and readers. These elements not only support the overall mood of the work, but also add depth to it, making it meaningful to a modern audience.

**The relevance of the study** lies in the fact that it demonstrates how contemporary writers adapt classical Gothic elements to the realities of today. In particular, the themes of death and isolation that are revealed in the novel reflect the contemporary experiences of many people - feelings of loneliness, loss, uncertainty about the future. In addition, reflections on loneliness and the search for one's own identity during dramatic events make these topics relevant to a wide audience.

Of particular interest is the combination of the Gothic tradition with folklore and mythological motifs, which enhances the sense of mystery. The author skillfully integrates elements of legends, mystical rituals, and supernatural phenomena, creating a unique combination of Gothic and fantasy motifs, making the work one of the brightest representatives of contemporary literature.

Gothic fantasy, as a genre, has a rich research background and has attracted the attention of many literary critics, such as Horace Walpole, Anne Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley. Contemporary Gothic literature, which often combines elements of horror with psychological depth, has also been the subject of numerous scholarly studies. However,

Erin Craig's novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* remains under-researched in terms of Gothic motifs. To date, there are a limited number of critical materials analyzing the combination of classical Gothic elements with a modern fantasy narrative, which makes its analysis an important addition to existing literary studies.

**The object of the study** is the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* [10] by Erin Craig and the gothic fantasy poetics elements used in it to create the atmosphere and develop the plot.

**The subject of the research** is specific Gothic fantasy motifs (death, isolation, supernatural) in the novel, as well as their function in shaping the narrative, revealing the characters and the relationship with folklore and mythological themes that enhance the Gothic effect.

**The purpose of this study** is to analyze in depth the Gothic fantasy poetics in Erin Craig's novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* and its role in creating a specific atmosphere that combines fear, mysticism, and psychological tension. Particular emphasis is placed on the study of how classical motifs of Gothic fantasy literature, such as isolation, death, the supernatural, and fatalism, are integrated into the contemporary narrative, creating a new interpretation of the Gothic fantasy tradition.

The novel is examined through the prism of its folklore and mythological roots, which allows us to explore a deeper layer of symbolism and its influence on the development of the plot and characterization. The purpose of the work is not only to identify these elements, but also to study how they affect the reader's perception, enhance the emotional impact of the work, and form a psychological portrait of the characters.

In addition, the study aims to examine contemporary social and psychological issues reflected in the novel, in particular the themes of isolation, loss, internal struggle with one's own fears, and the influence of the supernatural on the inner world of the characters. The analysis of the work will reveal how Gothic elements help to reveal these themes and how they respond to contemporary challenges of society.

Thus, the goal is to identify how the Gothic tradition adapts to contemporary literature and how its classical themes can be transformed to reflect current psychological and social issues through the structure of the fantasy novel.

### **Research objectives**

- To identify the main Gothic motifs present in the novel and to study their function in plotting and creating the atmosphere.
- To analyze the key themes of the novel (death, isolation, the supernatural) in the context of the traditions of Gothic fantasy.
- To consider the influence of folklore and mythological elements on the Gothic aesthetics of the novel and their importance for the disclosure of characters and events.
- To evaluate how Erin Craig's novel reflects contemporary social and psychological issues through the prism of the Gothic tradition.
- To find out how the use of Gothic elements contributes to the emotional involvement of the reader and forms a unique narrative style.

### **Theoretical and methodological basis of the study**

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is based on several approaches:

- The theory of Gothic literature is used to analyze key Gothic motifs, such as fear, isolation, mystery, and the supernatural, which form the basis of the genre.
- Narrative analysis helps to explore how a novel's composition, plot, and symbolism shape the Gothic atmosphere and maintain its emotional effect.
- Folklore and mythological approaches allow us to explore the elements of folk beliefs, legends, and myths that penetrate the text and their influence on the fantasy context of the work.

- Psychological analysis aimed at studying the influence of Gothic elements on the psychology of characters and the development of themes of isolation, fear, and death.
- The comparative method is used to compare the Gothic elements in the novel with other contemporary literary works in the Gothic and fantasy genres.

This methodology allows for a comprehensive study of the novel in the context of the Gothic tradition and reveals how it interprets classical motifs through a modern literary prism.

### **Structure of the master's paper**

The master's thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters that include theoretical and practical analysis, conclusions, a list of references.

The introduction substantiates the relevance of the topic, defines the purpose and objectives of the study, outlines the object and subject of the research, and discusses the theoretical and methodological basis.

The first chapter contains a theoretical analysis of Gothic fiction, in particular its evolution from classical Gothic literature to modern fantasy works. It includes an examination of classical Gothic motifs (death, isolation, the supernatural) and their adaptation in contemporary literature, in particular in the novel by Erin Craig.

The second chapter is devoted to a practical analysis of the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows*. It provides a detailed analysis of key Gothic elements, such as isolation, death, and the supernatural, as well as their impact on the atmosphere and plot development. Additionally, the influence of folklore and mythological motifs on Gothic aesthetics and their significance for the disclosure of the themes of the work are explored.

The conclusions summarize the results of the study, summarize the role of Gothic elements in the construction of the narrative, and conclude that the adaptation of classical Gothic motifs in contemporary literature is possible.

In summary, Gothic fantasy remains an important literary genre capable of reflecting complex emotional and psychological states, which makes it relevant to the modern audience. The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of classical Gothic motifs in creating a tense atmosphere and their adaptation to the fantasy context. The objectives of the study include analyzing the main Gothic themes, such as death, isolation, and the supernatural, as well as their impact on plot development and characterization.

The work is based on a combination of theoretical literary approaches and practical textual analysis, which allows for a deeper understanding of the influence of Gothic aesthetics on the perception of the novel. The structure of the study includes theoretical and practical analysis, which provides a comprehensive study of the topic.



# THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY OF GOTHIC FICTION

## 1.1. The emergence and development of the Gothic fantasy genre

Gothic fantasy, or the Gothic novel, originated in the late eighteenth century as a genre that combined elements of horror, the supernatural, mysticism, and romance. The emergence of the Gothic is closely linked to the reaction to the Enlightenment, which promoted rationalism and a scientific approach. Gothic literature sought to contrast these ideas with irrational, often dark aspects of the human psyche, focusing on fears, passions, and fantasies that transcend logic and reason.

Gothic literature is based on a specific atmosphere and themes that combine elements of the supernatural, fatalism, isolation, and fear of the unknown. These are some of the key characteristics of the Gothic genre.

One of the most important features of Gothic fiction is the setting. These are often castles, monasteries, old mansions, or other isolated spaces that enhance the sense of danger and fear. These architectural objects serve as a symbol of the characters' isolation and alienation from society. Secluded, abandoned places are almost living characters in such works, often symbolizing the characters' inner world, which is dark, chaotic and restless [7].

In addition, Gothic literature often focuses on events that go beyond the natural or humanly explainable. Supernatural phenomena, such as ghosts, curses, and demonic forces, have always played an important role in the development of the plot, emphasizing the horror of the unknown and irrational. Usually, these elements serve to destroy the sense of security and stability in the characters' lives.

At the same time, Gothic fantasy also explores the complex internal conflicts of characters. Characters often suffer from mental trauma, mental anguish, or guilt that haunts them. The psychological complexity of the characters helps to immerse the reader in their inner struggle. Characters such as Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Rosemary in Ira Levine's *Rosemary's Baby* are examples of characters

who are trying to overcome their inner fears or mental anguish caused by their actions or external forces.

Also, one of the key themes of this genre is the feeling of persecution, both in the physical and psychological sense. The characters often feel that they are being watched or pursued by invisible forces. This creates an atmosphere of constant tension and paranoia that is characteristic of this genre. For example, in the works of Edgar Poe, the characters are often on the verge of reality and hallucination, which increases their sense of isolation and fear [49].

Despite the dark nature of the genre, gothic fiction also includes romantic motifs, especially those related to the ideas of doom and inevitable death. Love intrigues are often intertwined with threats or deadly dangers, and the relationship itself turns out to be fatal for one or both characters. This enhances the dramatic effect and emphasizes the theme of inevitable fate.

The founder of the Gothic novel is Horace Walpole, who published his landmark work *The Castle of Otranto* [62] in 1764. Walpole called his work a “Gothic story,” a term derived from the Gothic architectural style, which was associated with majestic but gloomy medieval castles. These architectural symbols became an important attribute of early Gothic literature [49].

Otranto Castle opened up a whole range of key elements that later became an integral part of Gothic fiction: dark, gloomy locations, mystical forces, enclosed spaces, ominous castles, mysterious curses, hidden family secrets, and, of course, supernatural events that blur the line between reality and the irrational. The Gothic novel also often explores the mental states of the characters, showing their fears and weaknesses in the face of uncertainty or threat.

The Gothic novel from Walpole attempted to combine traditional themes of romance, particularly love intrigue, with dark, gloomy atmospheric elements, creating a unique combination that captivated audiences who were no longer satisfied with the rational ideas of the Enlightenment alone. In the context of the literature of the time,

the Gothic was innovative precisely because of its willingness to address the hidden, dark aspects of human experience and fears [7].

In the nineteenth century, Gothic fiction experienced a real heyday thanks to numerous literary innovations that significantly expanded and deepened its content. During this period, authors began to combine classical Gothic elements with new literary trends and scientific ideas, which led to the emergence of such important trends as science fiction, psychological analysis, and criticism of social and moral problems of the society of the time. Key authors of the nineteenth century, such as Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and Bram Stoker, not only maintained the Gothic tradition but also enriched the genre with new ideas, creating a more complex and deeper literary structure. As Punter notes, «the Gothic mode adapted itself to the changing concerns of society, addressing issues such as identity, morality, and the boundaries of scientific exploration» [49].

Mary Shelley is one of the most influential authors of this period, and her novel *Frankenstein* [53] was a landmark work that combined elements of Gothic fiction with innovative scientific themes. Frankenstein tells the story of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, who experiments with the creation of life, leading to tragedy and immense responsibility for his actions. This work is considered to be one of the first examples of science fiction, as it raises questions about scientific experiments, ethical dilemmas, and the limits of human power.

Gothic motifs in Frankenstein are expressed through the dark and gloomy atmosphere, isolated locations, and supernatural aspects associated with the revival of life from the dead. At the same time, Shelley integrates into the novel innovative ideas about human responsibility to nature, the moral limits of scientific achievements, and the possible consequences of violating these limits.

Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most influential Gothic writers of the nineteenth century, significantly expanded the boundaries of the genre by introducing a deep psychological analysis of the characters. His works, such as *The Fall of the House of*

Usher [48], focus on the characters' inner states, including fears, guilt, paranoia, and madness. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Poe skillfully explores the psychological state of the protagonist Roderick Usher, his alienation, mental instability, and the fatal decline of the estate, which symbolizes the moral degradation of the Usher family itself.

Psychological aspects in Poe's works are often combined with supernatural phenomena, which makes his short stories a kind of bridge between classic Gothic horror and modern psychological prose. Poe uses Gothic symbolism to convey the inner struggles and fears of his characters, which creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and constant tension.

Bram Stoker, in his cult novel *Dracula* [60], also made a significant contribution to the development of Gothic fiction, but unlike Shelley and Poe, he addresses social criticism and cultural fears of the late nineteenth century. *Dracula* uses traditional Gothic elements—a castle in the Carpathians, a mysterious vampire, and nights filled with horrors—to create an atmosphere of fear of the “other.” However, Stoker also explores contemporary fears related to sexuality, foreign invasions, and threats to English national identity.

*Dracula* is an example of how Gothic fiction adapted to social changes and used them to create meaningful symbols. The vampire in the novel is not only a physical threat, but also a symbolic one: he embodies a threat to morality, traditional roles in society, and personifies the fear of strangers and foreigners. Through his character *Dracula*, Stoker touches upon the themes of colonialism, xenophobia, and the decline of traditional social institutions. «*Dracula* becomes a figure that represents the fears and anxieties of a society facing the unknown, reflecting contemporary concerns about immigration and the preservation of national identity» [50].

In the twentieth century, gothic fiction underwent a significant transformation, adapting to new social and cultural conditions. Although traditional elements of the genre, such as the supernatural, isolation, and dark locations, remained relevant,

authors began to introduce new themes and experiment with forms, creating modern versions of the Gothic. This evolution has allowed the gothic genre to exist in a variety of contexts, including fantasy, psychological thrillers, and even science fiction.

The Gothic became an extremely flexible genre that began to interact with other literary trends. One example is the combination of the Gothic with horror. Authors such as Stephen King have skillfully used Gothic motifs to create an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty in their works. For example, in his novel *The Shining* [36] (1977), the isolated Overlook Hotel becomes a symbol of isolation, psychological pressure, and hidden evil, which is gradually revealed through the internal struggle of the characters.

Also worth mentioning is Neil Gaiman, whose work is at the intersection of fantasy and gothic. In his novel *Coraline* [19] (2002), Gaiman depicts a parallel world that has all the classic features of Gothic literature—from the mysterious, gloomy space to the dark forces that manipulate the minds of the characters. However, this world exists within a fantasy context, demonstrating how Gothic elements can fit into other genres, creating new hybrid forms of literature.

Also, one of the important features of contemporary Gothic fiction is the emphasis on psychological trauma and isolation, which are often metaphors for deeper social and personal problems. For example, in Ira Levin's novel *Rosemary's Baby* [37] (1967), an unusual combination of family drama and horror emphasizes the isolation of the protagonist, who feels detached from reality when she begins to suspect that everyone around her is conspiring against her. Levin uses the Gothic motif of persecution to show how isolation and distrust can destroy a person, turning the world around them into a source of danger.

Contemporary Gothic also often focuses on the theme of trauma, in particular how past experiences can haunt a person, destroying their mental state. This can be seen in many works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, where the characters face inner demons, which is a symbol of their deep emotional pain. For example, in Scott Smith's novel *The Ruins* [56] (2006), a group of friends are trapped in an abandoned

archaeological site where they face not only physical dangers but also their own fears and guilt.

Later, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Gothic literature acquired a deeper philosophical significance, as authors began to use genre elements to explore existential issues. Contemporary Gothic often raises questions about the nature of reality, the fear of the unknown, and the influence of the past on the present. For example, in *Crimson Peak*, a film by Guillermo del Toro, the themes of past cruelty, ghosts that haunt people, and how unresolved conflicts shape the characters' modern lives are revealed. This symbolizes the idea that the past always leaves its mark and cannot be simply ignored or forgotten [57].

In the case of Erin Craig's novel *House of Salt and Sorrows*, contemporary gothic fantasy takes on new forms, combining classic gothic elements with fairy tale motifs and psychological thrillers. This is an example of how contemporary authors use the flexibility of the Gothic genre to create original plots that intertwine dark family secrets, the supernatural, and psychological tension.

With the development of the genre, especially in the twentieth century, authors began to pay more attention to the psychological isolation of characters. This made it possible to explore inner fears and mental experiences more deeply than was possible in classical Gothic literature. In contemporary works, isolation becomes not only physical but also emotional and mental, where characters, even when among other people, feel separated and lonely.

Psychological isolation in Gothic fiction is an important element that allows authors to explore the internal conflicts of characters in greater depth. This motif is not limited to physical isolation, but provides an opportunity to examine complex aspects of the human psyche, such as existential fears, loss of identity, and disruption of social ties.

Existential fears that arise as a result of psychological isolation are often related to questions of the meaning of life, identity, and a person's place in the world. Characters

experiencing psychological isolation may feel disconnected from others, leading to internal struggles and deep emotional crises. This emphasizes the state of hopelessness, as isolated characters, despite their physical presence in society, cannot find understanding or support among others.

In contemporary gothic works, such as *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, psychological isolation can also symbolize a loss of identity. Characters may find it difficult to define themselves in a changing world and feel that their ties to others are being broken. This becomes especially evident in situations where characters are faced with the consequences of traumatic events or social pressures. The loss of connections with other people tends to increase feelings of loneliness and helplessness.

## 1.2. Characteristic features and motifs of Gothic fiction

Gothic fiction is characterized by unique features and motifs that have appeared since the genre's inception and continue to evolve in contemporary works. Among the most important characteristics are several key elements: an atmosphere of fear and anxiety, isolation, supernatural phenomena, dark family secrets, exploration of the psychological state of the characters, and symbolic use of space.

The atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and depression is a fundamental element of Gothic fiction, which creates a sense of constant threat and uncertainty. It is because of this atmosphere that Gothic works evoke an emotional response in the reader that keeps him or her in suspense. Such an atmosphere is achieved through a number of literary techniques: description of space, formidable natural phenomena, creating a sense of danger and mystery hidden behind visible events.

One of the main components of the Gothic atmosphere is the use of specific scenery and locations. Gothic works often feature abandoned castles, abandoned houses, old cemeteries, and other dark and mysterious places that have a symbolic meaning. They represent not only the physical isolation of the characters, but also their metaphorical isolation from society, nature, and even themselves. For example, the castle in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* [47] not only serves as a backdrop for the events, but also symbolizes the decline and disintegration of the Usher family. This building seems to have a life of its own, which only increases the tension and fear of what might happen next.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the atmosphere is maintained by the harsh and secluded setting of Transylvania. The remote castle of Dracula and its environment create the impression of deafness and hopelessness, the feeling that the characters cannot escape from danger. Transylvania in Stoker's novel becomes not only a geographical location, but also a symbol of the unknown and the threat posed by the supernatural.

In contemporary works of Gothic fiction, such as *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, the atmosphere of gloom is enhanced by the description of an isolated



manor by the sea, which becomes a trap for the characters. The sea, as a symbol of instability and the unknown, surrounds the characters from all sides, creating the feeling that escape is impossible. This element of natural power adds to the sense of threat that is constantly growing.

The atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and oppression is a fundamental element of Gothic fiction, which determines its unique character and impact on the reader. It is created through a combination of various literary techniques, such as specific language, symbolism, narrative pacing, and intertextuality. The aesthetics of fear in the Gothic novel is based on the use of dark symbols, metaphors, and allegories that convey the unknown and threatening. Starting from Romanticism, Gothic fiction reflects individual emotions, nature, inner fears, and psychological anxieties of the characters, which allows for a deeper emotional connection between the reader and the work [7].

Psychological realism is one of the key aspects in creating this atmosphere. The authors explore the internal states of the characters, their fears and experiences, which makes the narrative more complex and exciting. Gothic fiction not only depicts external threats, but also explores internal conflicts that reflect the emotional world of the characters [49].

Intertextuality is another important tool that helps shape the atmosphere of Gothic literature. Involvement in other literary works, myths, and legends adds an additional layer of meaning and enhances the sense of connection to the literary tradition. This allows contemporary works such as *House of Salt and Sorrows* to utilize classic elements of the genre while integrating new ideas and concepts, creating an atmosphere that immerses the reader in a dark but fascinating world of fear and anxiety.

The next very important motif is Isolation. In Gothic fiction, it plays a key role because it is a tool for delving into the inner world of characters, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and revealing the darker sides of the human psyche. The theoretical analysis of isolation in Gothic literature allows us to understand why this motif is so widespread and how it has evolved over time.

Physical isolation in classic Gothic works is usually presented in the form of remote locations, such as castles, monasteries, or secluded houses. It creates the preconditions for tension and danger, as characters find themselves in a physically confined space where threats become inevitable. It is important to note that in such locations, the outside world is often inaccessible, which reinforces the characters' sense of helplessness and dependence on events they cannot control.

According to David Punter's research, the motif of isolation in Gothic literature serves as a metaphor for deeper social and individual fears. Isolated, enclosed spaces are not just locations where events unfold, but symbolize the characters' inability to escape from the dangers and conflicts they experience both externally and internally. The characters in such places are under pressure not only from external threats but also from their own internal fears, anxieties, or mental disorders.

Isolation in Gothic works acts as a reflection of the state of mind of the characters, who often find themselves in conditions of chaos and uncertainty that haunt them. This creates a strong emotional connection between the plot and the psychological state of the characters. Closed spaces act as a visual and symbolic representation of fear, powerlessness and unpredictability. In addition, isolation often serves as a means of exploring social issues such as alienation, loneliness, or even marginalization of individuals in society, which enhances the overall unsettling atmosphere of the work [49].

Catherine Spooner emphasizes the importance of psychological isolation for “a deeper dive into the characters' mental state. This opens up the possibility for readers to immerse themselves in the complex and often contradictory inner world of characters struggling with their fears. This immersion allows authors to present the nuances of mental health that may not be accessible through traditional narrative structures [59].

For example, when a character feels that no one understands their fears, it can create a deep sense of hopelessness. Whereas traditional stories may focus on external

conflicts, gothic works often turn away from this to show how internal experiences can be just as threatening as physical dangers.

This form of psychological isolation adds to the unsettling atmosphere of the work, as the isolated characters face their worst fears without the ability to find support or understanding. When readers see characters struggle with their inner demons, it evokes deeper emotions and empathy as they realize that the characters' fears may be similar to their own.

The next important point for Gothic fantasy is the presence of the supernatural. The supernatural in Gothic literature is a key element that not only serves to create an atmosphere of mystery and fear, but also serves as a profound metaphor for exploring psychological and social issues. In classical works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [53], supernatural phenomena reflect the consequences of human ambition and technological progress that goes beyond control. Frankenstein's creation becomes the embodiment of these dangerous ambitions, recreating the classic Gothic theme of supernatural menace, which is combined with philosophical questions about the ethics of science and the limits of human power.

Usually, supernatural phenomena embody people's deepest fears of what they cannot control or explain - it can be death, curse, or loss of control over their own lives. These aspects create emotional tension and emphasize the vulnerability of the characters.

According to David Punter, the supernatural in the Gothic often reflects basic existential fears, in particular, of the unknown and dangerous world around us. It becomes a metaphor for phenomena that cannot be explained rationally or logically. This unknown frightens both characters and readers because it evokes a sense of powerlessness – the characters are unable to resist the mysterious forces that violate the natural order [49].

In addition, the supernatural can symbolize the internal state of the characters, their subconscious fears and anxieties. According to Catherine Spooner, contemporary

Gothic literature uses the supernatural as a tool for a deeper analysis of the psychological state of characters, turning an external threat into a reflection of their internal problems and crises. Thus, the supernatural in Gothic works acts not only as an external danger but also as a symbol of internal chaos and unresolved conflicts [57].

In contemporary Gothic literature, the supernatural becomes a tool for creating ambiguity that deepens the emotional and psychological impact on the reader. Often, events or phenomena that seem supernatural can be interpreted in two ways: either as the real presence of something beyond human understanding, or as manifestations of mental disorders and internal crises of characters. This approach creates uncertainty, as the reader is constantly hesitating between the two possible explanations for what is happening.

The duality of the supernatural in contemporary Gothic literature blurs the boundaries between the real world and what can be a figment of the imagination or a consequence of the characters' traumas and experiences. This adds even more tension and intrigue, as the supernatural ceases to be just an external factor and turns into a reflection of the characters' internal states. This ambiguity allows us to use supernatural phenomena as a symbol of emotional trauma that characters cannot master or control [58].

For example, in many contemporary Gothic works, ghosts or other mystical forces can be both real and imaginary. The characters are often in a state of mental crisis, where their ability to distinguish between reality and illusion is impaired. This blurring of the boundaries between the real and the supernatural not only adds to the atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty, but also creates a metaphor for the characters' struggle with their own inner demons and fears.

Such ambiguity in contemporary Gothic fiction performs several important functions, making the works more multilayered and emotionally intense. One of the main advantages of this structural ambiguity is that it keeps the reader in a constant state of tension, forcing them to question their own assumptions about the nature of the

events unfolding on the pages. Since the boundaries between the real and the supernatural are often blurred, the reader is unable to determine whether the supernatural phenomena are real or just the result of the characters' subjective mental experiences.

This ambiguity is key to contemporary gothic fiction, as it allows authors to explore the psychological state of characters in greater depth, including their fears, mental disorders, and emotional trauma. Instead of the supernatural acting as a separate external element, it becomes a symbol of the internal conflicts and problems faced by the characters. This opens up the possibility of exploring themes such as mental health, isolation, loss of control, and trauma.

In addition, ambiguity promotes a deeper dive into the traditional motifs of Gothic literature, but in new contexts. The authors use this technique to create a connection between classical themes, such as fear of the unknown and the unexplored, and contemporary issues, such as isolation caused by mental illness or social barriers. Exploring these themes through the prism of the supernatural allows authors to create works that combine traditional Gothic with deep psychological and philosophical analysis, making the genre even more relevant and universal in the contemporary literary space.

In besides, the supernatural in contemporary Gothic fantasy literature often acts not only as an external threat but also as a means of expressing deep internal conflicts and psychological experiences of the characters. This allows authors to create multilayered plots where external supernatural events resonate with the inner world of the characters, their fears, anxieties, and emotional turmoil. The supernatural becomes a metaphor for those fears and anxieties that the characters cannot fully realize or overcome.

As Catherine Spooner notes, this approach in contemporary Gothic transforms the supernatural from a mere external threat into a means for deeper disclosure of the psychological and emotional aspects of the characters. Authors often use supernatural

elements to reflect the internal chaos that reigns in the minds of characters, their struggle with fears or even traumas of the past. In this way, the line between the real and the supernatural is blurred, and the reader is immersed in a complex world of characters where reality and imagination are closely intertwined [57].

The supernatural can symbolize subconscious fears that characters are not always able to realize or master, but they manifest themselves through external, often mystical events. This turns supernatural phenomena into symbols of internal conflicts, such as loss of control, fear of the unknown, or the inability to escape from traumatic experiences. Instead of being just a means to create an atmosphere of fear, the supernatural in contemporary Gothic literature becomes a powerful psychological tool that allows us to explore complex aspects of the human psyche and emotional instability.

This metaphorical function of the supernatural gives Gothic works a special depth, as they explore not only external fears but also the internal forces that drive the characters. This makes contemporary Gothic more complex and rich than classical works, as it opens up new possibilities for interpreting supernatural events as a manifestation of internal conflicts and fears.

The next important element is the presence of family secrets. The motif of family secrets has always played an important role in Gothic literature, as it allows us to explore the complex relationship between the past and the present, between the hidden and the explicit. Family secrets that are gradually revealed often cause major conflicts in the plot. They enhance the atmosphere of mystery and anxiety, creating the feeling that each new detail revealed opens up new trials or frightening discoveries for the characters. In classic Gothic literature, these secrets not only explain the behavior of the characters but also form the basis of the emotional pressure that builds up throughout the novel.

In contemporary Gothic literature, family secrets become not only plot drivers but also deep psychological studies of the characters' state of mind. These secrets often

affect the characters at the level of their consciousness, forming internal conflicts that are reflected in their behavior, interaction with other characters, and decision-making. The burden of the family past becomes a kind of “inheritance” imposed on the characters, forcing them to face hidden fears, distrust, and despair. Authors of contemporary Gothic fiction focus not only on external events but also on how these events shape the inner world of the characters, causing emotional turmoil, traumatic memories, and even mental disorders.

For example, contemporary Gothic works often depict characters who have hidden or repressed memories of past events that affect their actions in the present. Family secrets can become symbols of deep fears and painful experiences that the characters try to suppress or forget, but they keep coming back, forcing the characters to face their inner demons. At the same time, these secrets can create an atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia, when the characters cannot fully trust others or even themselves, because the hidden past constantly affects their present.

This psychological burden not only shapes the character of the characters, but also enhances the drama of the plot, making it multidimensional. Family secrets become the starting point for the characters' inner journeys, where they are forced to rethink their identity, relationships with their loved ones, and even the world they live in. This approach allows the authors to explore deeper questions - not only about what happened in the past, but also about how this past shapes the present and future of the characters, often turning their lives into an endless cycle of anxiety and fear.

It is also important to note that family secrets in Gothic literature are not just a plot device, but an important part of the deep emotional and psychological impact on the characters. Often these secrets are related to the themes of death, heredity, or even fate, which adds to their existential significance. They become symbols of the irreversibility of life events and the inevitability of the past, which, even if hidden or forgotten, continues to influence the lives of the characters. In Gothic literature, where the central theme is the tension between the past and the present, family secrets act as a chain that the characters cannot break. Death and inheritance play a key role in shaping these

themes, as secrets often focus on generations passed down through the years and affect each new member of the family. Secrets that have not been resolved in the past haunt subsequent generations, creating a sense that none of the characters can escape their heritage. This is closely related to the theme of fate, as family curses, unexplained deaths, or invisible obligations become a symbol of the characters' inability to fully control their own lives. No matter how hard they try to escape the past, it always comes back to influence their decisions, psychological state, and life circumstances.

The deep connection with fate reinforces the sense of helplessness of the characters, who are forced to accept the consequences of the past, even if they were not direct participants in the events. This creates a sense of an eternal struggle with invisible forces, whether it is with family secrets or with one's own identity, which cannot be completely changed due to the influence of family history. The sense of irreversibility becomes an important part of the psychological tension in Gothic works, when every secret revealed only adds new complications and creates new challenges for the characters.

Thus, in contemporary Gothic literature, family secrets not only reveal past events but also embody the fundamental struggle against the invisible burden of heredity and fate. They are not easily resolved and have far-reaching consequences, which makes them an important psychological and emotional aspect of the Gothic narrative, enhancing the overall atmosphere of fear and tension.

Gothic fiction has another important element: space. Space serves not only as an environment for the development of events, but also becomes an important tool for recreating the psychological state of characters. Landscapes, architecture, dark corridors, or abandoned castles are symbols of the characters' state of mind, their hidden fears, anxieties, and conflicts. Space reflects the internal tension, making it tangible to the reader: this allows the author to create a rich atmosphere where even the physical environment becomes a source of anxiety and threat.



Gothic space, represented by abandoned castles or dark labyrinths, acts as an extension of the characters' internal limitations and fears, emphasizing their inability to escape from the captivity of their own consciousness. These spaces are often constructed in such a way as to impede movement - narrow corridors, dead-end rooms, or locations where it is easy to get lost. Such places seem to have a will of their own that opposes the characters, reinforcing their sense of the futility of any effort to overcome their fears or find themselves. The labyrinth, in particular, is a powerful symbol: it reminds us of the complex nature of human consciousness, where all attempts to find a way out can only result in new obstacles and false turns.

The psychological trap created by the gloomy space indicates the state of the characters, who either do not know themselves or feel confused in their own minds. In this case, the Gothic space becomes a metaphor for the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious, between the desire to overcome fear and the subconscious inability to get rid of it. It is important that this is not just physical isolation, but existential: a labyrinthine castle or forest is the personification of inner emptiness and ignorance of one's own depths, from which characters are not always able to return.

This structure of space also emphasizes the burden of the past that hangs over the characters. Gothic labyrinths and castles that hold secrets and long-lost illusions keep the characters trapped in stories they either don't know or are unable to understand. In this sense, space becomes an element of time, where every step only leads backwards, deepening their isolation and anxiety about the unknown.

An important aspect of the Gothic space is that it simultaneously acts as a symbol of decay and fear of the past. According to David Punter, space in the Gothic genre becomes a reflection of the time, where the decline of architecture is associated with forgetting or loss, as well as the continuous decomposition of values or memories. Every detail of such a space reminds the characters and readers of the inevitability of the passing of time and the consequences of events that leave an indelible mark on the characters' souls [49].

The symbolic space of Gothic fiction also creates a constant sense of anxiety and threat: it is impossible to predict or control, which enhances the emotional effect of the work. The space where the events take place is not only a physical environment, but also a “living” character that hides secrets and constantly tests the characters. In this way, gothic fiction integrates space into the narrative structure, increasing tension and creating a multilayered symbolic reality that draws the reader into the atmosphere of the work.

Also, in gothic fantasy, the motif of the duality of reality and fantasy is one of the main tools that deepens the psychological effect and enhances the atmosphere of mystery. Often described as a “blurring of the lines” between the real and the supernatural, this motif is a characteristic feature of the genre, as gothic fantasy is traditionally built on a balance between these two worlds, where the reader and the characters are both fascinated and afraid of invisible forces that transcend the ordinary.

The motif of blurred boundaries has its roots in classical Gothic literature, which dates back to the eighteenth century. In works such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* [62] or Edgar Allen Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* [48], the line between the real and the supernatural is often deliberately blurred, creating a sense of psychological tension and constant doubt. Unexplained, frightening events do not always have a clear explanation, which makes the reader and the characters doubt their feelings and the very nature of the phenomena. This reinforces the main theme of the Gothic - the fear of the unknown, which arises both from external threats and from internal conflicts and anxieties of the human consciousness.

In Gothic fantasy, which combines classical Gothic and fantasy elements, this motif takes on a more complex level. Unlike classical Gothic, where the supernatural often symbolizes the psychological or social anxieties of the characters, in Gothic fantasy the supernatural becomes real and is often explored as an organic part of the world, but with a constant sense of distrust. The characters are not always able to separate fantasy elements from the real, and this creates ambiguity and anxiety. A reader immersed in the world of Gothic fantasy finds himself in a state of constant

tension, because events and phenomena can have both rational explanations and supernatural meanings. This creates a unique atmosphere of the genre, where reality can always be an illusion, and events can be the result of the play of otherworldly forces.

The duality of reality and fantasy in gothic fantasy also serves as an important psychological tool, reflecting the internal conflicts of the characters. They not only face external threats but also have to deal with their inner fears, doubts, and paranoid thoughts. Often, the characters in such novels live in a world where their personal anxieties and fears seem to come to life, and the surrounding space becomes a reflection of their inner state. This turns familiar objects and events into sources of fear, because the characters cannot understand whether they are a real threat or a reflection of their consciousness. For example, mirrors and reflections become a symbol of the separation of consciousness and external reality when the characters face their fears literally, watching shadows and ghosts in the mirror.

Gothic fantasy also creates such an effect for the reader, because this genre allows you to immerse yourself in an atmosphere of constant doubt and tension, when every event can hide the otherworldly or be influenced by the hero's imagination. Unlike classical fantasy, where the world is clearly defined and the supernatural has its own clear rules, in gothic fantasy the supernatural is not necessarily logical, creating a constant sense of uncertainty and anxiety. The reader is forced to search for the truth together with the characters, to experience every moment in a state of psychological instability, because even familiar things can be threatening or completely different than they seem.

This motif of blurring reality and fantasy in contemporary gothic fantasy can be found in works such as *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman, where the protagonist enters a world that is both strange and familiar, where every phenomenon raises doubts about its truth. In the novel *Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia, the protagonist encounters eerie events that can be explained by both poisoning and otherworldly interference. A similar situation can be observed in *House of Salt and*

*Sorrows* by Erin Craig, where the boundary between the world of the living and the dead, the real and the fantasy remains blurred, reinforcing the sense of doom and incomprehensibility.

Thus, the motif of the duality of reality and fantasy in gothic fantasy serves not only to create an eerie atmosphere but also to explore the psychological aspects of fear, which becomes an important expressive tool in the genre. This motif becomes a way of expanding the perception of the world by both the hero and the reader, reminding us that in reality it is not always possible to separate truth from fiction, and the otherworldly is not always just a metaphor - it can affect every aspect of the characters' lives, forcing them to reflect on their own nature and the unknown forces that control their fate.

### **1.3. Modern Gothic fiction: influence on the literary process**

Contemporary Gothic fantasy has several unique features that distinguish it from the classic examples of the genre of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reflecting new social and cultural changes. Contemporary gothic literature increasingly focuses not on external manifestations of fear, such as ghosts, monsters, or curses, but on the study of internal tensions and psychological problems of the characters. This approach moves away from the traditional notion of horror as an external threat, where the source of fear is supernatural forces, and instead provides space for the development of the theme of internal conflicts. This psychological tension allows for a deeper exploration of the emotional and mental aspects of the characters, often through disturbing situations or images that metaphorically represent hidden fears or unresolved psychological issues.

This shifted emphasis also reflects modern approaches to the study of the human psyche, where mental disorders, anxiety, depression, and other forms of emotional instability become a source of tension and fear. In contemporary Gothic works, the characters often find themselves trapped in the psychological mind of their own minds. Images that evoke anxiety or even horror can be the result of mental stress or internal trauma that characters experience in response to difficult social or personal circumstances. This creates a multilayered meaning where reality and imagination intertwine, enhancing the reader's sense of uncertainty.

Sarah Perry and Shirley Jackson are among the authors whose works skillfully explore psychological tension through the prism of Gothic elements. In their texts, eerie events and phenomena often serve as metaphors for internal crises and the characters' struggle with their own demons. For example, in Sarah Perry's novel *The Essex Serpent*, the themes of fear and anxiety unfold against the backdrop of an isolated village, where the supernatural image of the serpent personifies the anxiety and paranoia of the locals, which subconsciously reflect the characters' inner experiences. Such works show that contemporary Gothic is capable of working with both

supernatural images and psychological conflicts, creating an intriguing atmosphere where the line between the real and the fantasy becomes blurred [27].

Contemporary gothic fiction is in the process of transformation, focusing on the newest forms of anxiety that stem from today's social and cultural conditions. One of the important aspects of the genre is the expansion of the subject matter from classic depictions of ghosts or monsters to more complex themes, such as fear of environmental disasters, the decline of cultural identity, or the impact of rapid technological development.

The theme of the environmental crisis is becoming increasingly important in contemporary Gothic literature, especially in those works that address climate change, environmental pollution, and the destruction of ecosystems. Such literature moves away from classical Gothic symbols, giving nature new meanings, in particular, portraying it as a threatening force capable of a kind of “revenge” on humanity. According to Natalie Cecil, nature in contemporary Gothic texts often appears as “a contradictory entity, both beautiful and terrifying,” symbolizing people's internal anxieties about the inevitable consequences of environmental disaster.

In some contemporary works, the images of storms, floods, droughts, and fires become metaphorical embodiments of environmental threats, where nature turns into an autonomous character—a force that cannot be controlled and that opposes human activity. This brings the genre closer to “eco-gothic” literature, which explores the intersection of environmental and gothic themes, focusing on how nature changes under the influence of humans and what can happen when it “responds.” In such works, the characters often face an imminent threat from the environment, which has lost its harmony and is teetering on the brink of disaster, emphasizing humanity's dependence on nature and, at the same time, its helplessness in the face of it.

By drawing attention to the symbolism of nature, the authors not only show the fear of environmental disaster, but also view it as a metaphor for outdated social and moral norms that need to be changed. Nature becomes a symbol not only of external

changes, but also of deep psychological shifts in human consciousness. As the researcher Christina Hacchi notes in her work *Ecogothic Readings of Nature*, such works emphasize the invisible connection between the inner world of the characters and the environment, where nature acts as a kind of “mirror” of human fears and guilt. This type of Gothic space evokes emotional tension in the reader, as it turns nature into something unknown and unwelcoming, with which it is difficult to coexist, emphasizing the idea of human alienation from the natural environment.

Another important aspect that manifests itself in the gothic fantasy genre is anxiety. But unlike in the 19th century, in contemporary Gothic fiction this anxiety is more related to the loss of cultural identity. This theme in contemporary Gothic fiction is becoming especially relevant in the context of globalization, which causes the blurring of national boundaries and cultural differences. The authors of Gothic texts use this motif to emphasize alienation and the crisis of identity in a world where the sense of belonging is becoming less and less stable. The loss of cultural heritage is manifested here as an internal conflict of characters who feel unable to understand their own identity or understand their place in the world. Characters often face a challenge that forces them to deal with a cultural heritage that they have either lost or no longer understand. This heritage carries important meaning, but often also has a negative connotation, such as unresolved conflicts of the past or traumatic events passed down from generation to generation. The characters feel detached from their own roots, but at the same time they are unable to escape the influence of the past, which is kept in the shadows of family stories or ancient traditions.

An additional aspect is that the authors of contemporary Gothic fiction portray the loss of cultural identity not only as a personal tragedy, but as a symbol of a broader social shift in which the boundaries between cultures are blurred and the stability of identity is destroyed. In this perspective, contemporary Gothic fiction becomes a response to cultural changes that threaten to erode identity, as well as to the sense of depersonalization that characterizes the modern globalized world. Characters in such works are often caught between contemporary conditions and deeply rooted traditions,

making their existence seem “between worlds” - in a place where neither the present nor the past is fully accepted.

These themes are expanded through folklore or mythological elements, where seemingly magical or supernatural motifs become symbols of the characters' internal conflict. The mythology of the past is perceived not only as a cultural heritage, but also as a certain threat that needs to be “deciphered” or reinterpreted in the modern context. Thus, contemporary Gothic not only explores the problem of identity loss, but also raises the question of whether it is possible to truly reconnect with one's own roots in a world where cultural guidelines and social structures are constantly changing.

In addition, in contemporary Gothic fiction, alienation due to the loss of cultural roots is often conveyed through images of abandoned places that serve as metaphors for the destructive processes of assimilation and neglect of traditions. Such spatial images heighten the tension and fear that the past carries a burden that can no longer be recreated or restored. The author Katherine Sung notes that it is through such techniques that contemporary Gothic shows how the destruction of the traditional way of life goes hand in hand with a crisis of identity, leaving the characters trapped in a place where their personal memories and ideas about cultural heritage become ghostly ideals that are unattainable in the modern world.

The next difference is the integration of postmodern elements into Gothic fantasy. This technique adds new meanings and possibilities for interpretation to the genre, emphasizing fragmentation, skepticism, and a sense of uncertainty. Postmodernism, which denies single truths and certain realities, allows authors to create stories where the line between truth and fiction becomes blurred. In contemporary gothic fiction, this approach is realized through an ironic attitude to classical gothic images and archetypes, as well as through the interweaving of different layers of reality, leaving the reader in a state of constant doubt as to what is depicted as true and what is just the imagination of the characters or a distortion of their perception.



Another important aspect is the blurring of the boundaries between illusion and reality. This becomes a central theme that adds depth to the works and creates a sense of uncertainty. Postmodernist techniques such as the unreliable narrator and fragmented narrative structure become important means of allowing the reader to experience an atmosphere of uncertainty and doubt. When the reader cannot be sure that what is depicted is “true,” a sense of anxiety arises, which adds to the tension of the story. This technique forces us not only to follow the development of events, but also to constantly assess the mental state of the characters, their possible distortions of perception or even their own subconscious desires that may affect their vision of reality.

The unreliable narrator in contemporary Gothic literature serves not only as a stylistic device but also deepens the psychological aspects of the text. In some works, the characters can be both victims of their own consciousness and creators of illusions that help them avoid real problems. For example, characters may feel fear and anxiety about the outside world, and to overcome this fear, their consciousness creates illusions that become “reality” within the story. In Margaret Atwood's texts, this is especially noticeable: the characters often doubt their own memories and experiences, which creates the impression that reality is breaking up into fragments, each of which can only be a fiction or a consequence of a mental disorder [52],[1].

The fragmented structure of the narrative also reinforces this uncertainty, as events may seem incomplete or opaque to the reader, leaving room for different interpretations. This structure allows authors to play with time frames, mixing memories, imaginary scenes, and real events. In novels like Atwood's, fragments of the story may be presented from different narrators or without a clear distinction at all, which makes it even more difficult to understand “objective” reality. This enhances the emotional effect and immerses the reader in a world where each fragment is perceived as a possible key to understanding the truth, but at the same time remains elusive [1]

Postmodernist strategies in contemporary Gothic art create a new level of fear, which is not based on terrors of the supernatural, but on a sense of destabilization and uncertainty, reflecting the anxiety of modern society in the face of the complexity and

fragmentation of the world. It is not a fear of what one can see or hear, but a fear of the lack of ground under one's feet - of a world where everything may turn out to be fictional or uncertain.

Contemporary gothic fiction raises the level of fear, replacing the classic horrors of external supernatural threats with internal anxieties associated with the instability and uncertainty of the modern world. This new level of fear is formed not by what the character can see or hear, but by the very feeling that reality has lost its clarity. Postmodern Gothic emphasizes the fluidity of modern existence, where nothing is stable anymore-not ideas, not social values, not one's own identity. In such a world, the horror is that a person can no longer confidently rely on their environment, their inner world, or even their own perception.

This approach is reinforced by the use of unreliable narrators, psychological ambiguity, and fragmented narrative structure, which reflect the anxiety and crisis that arises in the face of the loss of familiar landmarks. In such texts, the reader is forced to reconsider their own assumptions about events, characters, and even the very nature of reality. The characters are often in a state of internal tension, trying to understand what is really happening and to separate reality from illusion, which becomes almost impossible. This creates the feeling that the characters live in a world where every step is a risk of encountering new levels of uncertainty and unexplained conflicts [51].

Contemporary gothic fiction also raises the problem of identity and self-identification in the context of this uncertainty. The idea that a personality has no stable ground reinforces the atmosphere of instability and vulnerability. The characters often feel lost in their own doubts, entangled in their own fears, or unable to define who they really are, which deepens the sense of fragmentation. When the world around them seems uncertain and hostile, their sense of identity becomes as fluid and unstable as the world they are in. This creates a new kind of anxiety based on the feeling that one is no longer a “whole” person, and it reflects the crisis of modern society, where traditional roles and ideas are constantly being re-evaluated.

Gothic fiction has undergone significant transformations in the contemporary literary process, retaining elements of classic horror while addressing deep psychological and postmodern themes. The constant blurring of the boundaries between reality and illusion, the emphasis on psychological fears, and the use of irony and skepticism allow authors to create multilayered texts that reflect the anxieties of modern society. These are no longer just stories about ghosts or cursed places, but works that explore existential issues such as identity crisis, loss of cultural belonging, and the instability of reality.

Contemporary gothic fiction is able to reflect a chaotic, fragmented world in which the concepts of truth and stability become fluid, reflecting the fear of loss and uncertainty that characterize the 21st century. Thanks to its postmodern strategies and innovative approaches, gothic fiction continues to remain relevant and resonate with readers who, faced with instability and rapid change, can find in this genre a kind of mirror of their own anxieties and questions.

Thus, contemporary gothic fiction not only preserves the classic features of the genre but also develops them, adapting them to the needs and realities of the new time, becoming a space for comprehending fundamental fears that go beyond the supernatural and touch the essence of human existence.

## CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 1

Gothic literature initially emerged in response to the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and rationality, filling a narrative void with stories that embraced mystery, fear, and the unknown. In the beginning, Gothic novels like *Frankenstein* [53] introduced hallmarks of the genre: isolated, imposing settings, ancestral family secrets, and encounters with supernatural forces. These elements created a landscape rich in tension and suspense, laying a foundation where internal conflict and psychological fear became essential to the Gothic experience.

As Gothic literature developed, its thematic elements became more nuanced. Dark family histories, curses, and morally ambiguous characters took center stage, allowing for a deeper exploration of the human psyche. The genre highlighted vulnerabilities, ethical dilemmas, and inner fears, providing a lens through which readers could confront uncomfortable questions about human nature and societal norms. Classic works such as *Frankenstein* [53] enriched the genre with psychological depth, exploring isolation, existential dread, and the repercussions of characters' actions against the backdrop of eerie, often hostile landscapes. These works further solidified Gothic literature's identity as a medium through which audiences could explore suppressed emotions and subconscious anxieties.

In contemporary contexts, Gothic literature has evolved to address societal and environmental concerns, often blending with fantasy to resonate with modern readers' fears and aspirations. Themes of climate change, identity crises, and personal transformation reflect the genre's adaptability, infusing traditional Gothic elements with new relevance. Decaying estates and foreboding landscapes remain, but they now serve as symbolic reflections of the characters' internal struggles and the unresolved issues haunting their worlds. This modern Gothic-fantasy blend allows for a multilayered experience, one in which supernatural threats echo real-life anxieties, inviting readers to confront personal and collective fears within dark, suspenseful narratives.

Through this evolution, Gothic fantasy maintains its dynamic nature, balancing its allure of supernatural and mysterious elements with profound psychological exploration and contemporary relevance. The genre continues to captivate, using classic motifs and new themes to question reality, morality, and the human experience, offering a powerful narrative space where readers can face universal fears and uncertainties amid atmospheres rich in tension and symbolism.

## CHAPTER 2 A PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN THE NOVEL “HOUSE OF SALT AND SORROWS” BY ERIN CRAIG

### 2.1. Plot and characters as the embodiment of Gothic archetypes

Gothic archetypes are central elements of Gothic literature, creating a special atmosphere of fear, mystery, and uncertainty. These archetypes form the basis of the genre, giving the plots and characters depth and ambiguity. They help authors build a world where the line between the real and the supernatural becomes blurred, and characters are constantly confronted with their own inner demons and external threats.

The motif of the family curse in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* plays a key role in creating a Gothic atmosphere full of anxiety and fatality. This archetype is based on the idea that an invisible but powerful force haunts a family, being passed down from generation to generation and inevitably leading to tragic consequences. In Erin Craig's novel, the family curse is realized through a series of mysterious deaths of the protagonist's sisters, Annaleigh. This development of events creates a sense of inevitability: each new death reinforces the impression that the characters are subject to a terrible fate that they cannot avoid, regardless of their actions or efforts.

At the very beginning of the novel, Annaleigh recalls the loss of her sisters and the feeling that death inevitably accompanies their family: "*Death had claimed four of my sisters, and though the villagers spoke of accident and misfortune, I couldn't shake the feeling that something more sinister was at play*". [10] This statement by Annaleigh indicates her suspicion that the deaths were not just accidental, but perhaps some darker force. From the very beginning, Craig creates the feeling that the heroine feels a burden hanging over her family, and this burden is a manifestation of the classic Gothic archetype of the curse.

In *House of Salt and Sorrows*, the family curse acts not only as a physical threat to the lives of family members, but also as a symbolic burden that affects their inner state, generating fear, anxiety, and distrust. Annaleigh and her family feel that they are being affected by forces beyond their understanding or control, and this not only frightens them, but also increases their sense of despair. Each new tragedy seems to hang over

the characters, reminding them of the eternal debt to the past, the sins or mistakes of their ancestors that affect the present. In this sense, the curse becomes a metaphor for hereditary trauma that is passed down from one generation to the next, preventing family members from escaping the shadow of the past.

Another scene that reinforces the sense of the curse occurs when Annaleigh describes the growing fear and paranoia in the family after another death: "*The halls were filled with whispers and shadows, as if the walls themselves were watching us, waiting for the next tragedy to unfold* " [10]. This description emphasizes how the atmosphere of the curse penetrates even the physical space of the estate, where every detail around reminds the heroine of an invisible but tangible threat. The feeling that "the walls themselves are watching" creates an image of a closed space where the characters feel trapped under the inevitable influence of the curse.

This motif also maintains tension between family members, as each lives in fear, waiting for the next victim. This constant threat creates an atmosphere of distrust and isolation, when even the closest relatives begin to doubt each other and their future. The curse in Gothic works is often endowed with mysterious, supernatural features, which makes it inseparable from the world where supernatural forces and mysterious influences exist. In the case of *House of Salt and Sorrows*, the curse takes on a symbolic meaning, reflecting the internal struggle that the characters are waging against invisible but very tangible forces that threaten not only their lives but also their peace of mind.

Another important moment occurs when Annaleigh contemplates the fate of her family and comes to the conclusion that all their attempts to break this fatal chain are in vain: "*We are marked, each of us. No matter how far we run, this shadow follows*" [10]. Here, she literally recognizes the impossibility of escaping the curse that has left its mark on all family members. This quote further emphasizes the doom of the characters, their feeling that nothing can save them from the burden of the past and the invisible forces that keep them under control.

The plot shows a deep integration of the archetype of isolation, characteristic of Gothic works, and it is embodied through the remote location of the Annaleigh family estate, surrounded by the sea. This creates a physical and psychological trap for the characters, emphasizing their alienation from the outside world and the impossibility of escape. The isolated island space makes Annaleigh feel trapped and helpless. She says: “It was as if the house itself had a grip on us, pulling us closer, refusing to let any of us leave. The sea around us was both a cradle and a cage” [10]. In this quote, the sea and the mansion become both a “cradle” and a “cage” for the heroine, reflecting Annaleigh's complex feelings - on the one hand, her attachment to home, on the other hand, the feeling of being trapped with no way out.

This duality of the symbolism of the surrounding sea enhances the atmosphere of gothic isolation, reminding us that the heroine feels literally trapped between invisible forces that keep her in this place. The island is a physical barrier, but also a psychological one, as every attempt to escape seems impossible. This creates a sense of hopelessness that permeates the entire novel and reflects the inner state of Annaleigh, who simultaneously longs to escape from this space but also feels inseparable from this isolated world.

Isolation is also emphasized by the attitude of other people who avoid the estate, knowing about the tragedies that have occurred in the family. Annaleigh reflects on how their lives are different from the rest of the world, and how this distance creates tension between her and other people: “People looked at us differently. Whispers followed us through the village, the sea around us kept us in a world all our own” [10]. This alienation from the rest of the world creates additional psychological pressure on Annaleigh and her family. They become like a “closed world” on their island, where everything is subject to their own rules and dark events that haunt them.

This quote also emphasizes how external perceptions further reinforce their isolation, making the island not only physically but also socially segregated. Even when they go outside the estate, they remain “other,” outcasts in their own society. This reinforces Annaleigh's feeling that she and her family are forever doomed to exist in



their closed world, where every step of the people around them reminds them of their distance from normal life.

Another moment that emphasizes the trapped atmosphere comes when Annaleigh describes her constant fears and the feeling that the mansion is literally holding her within its walls: “The halls felt like they were closing in, each shadow seeming to creep closer, as if the house itself was trying to swallow us whole” [10]. This image emphasizes how the physical structure of the mansion, its corridors and shadows begin to seem hostile and threatening to Annaleigh, as if the house itself has a life of its own and reinforces her fears. This personification of the house is a classic Gothic technique, where space becomes an active participant in the events, increasing the psychological tension of the protagonist.

The archetype of the blurred line between reality and fantasy is one of the central themes in *House of Salt and Sorrows*, creating an atmosphere where the protagonist and the reader are constantly questioning the authenticity of events. The protagonist, Annaleigh, is in a state of internal conflict when she begins to question what she sees and feels. After a series of tragedies befall her family, she witnesses unusual, sometimes even eerie phenomena that seem to go beyond her understanding. Each new event, which has a touch of the supernatural, makes her wonder: is it just her mental reaction to loss and stress, or is there really some dark force that is haunting her family?

For example, Annaleigh sees visions of her dead sisters, which she takes as a hint of their restlessness. In one scene, she remarks: “*Sometimes, I could swear I felt them - my sisters' presence lingering, like the smell of salt on the wind, just at the edge of my senses*” [10]. Here, the image of the sisters' presence becomes subtle, barely perceptible, like the smell of salt in the air, which never completely disappears. This quote reflects how Annaleigh's fears and guilt are intertwined with her perception of reality, giving the impression that her deceased sisters are always there, and perhaps even trying to communicate with her. This prompts the reader to question whether these are real spirits or the result of the psychological pressure the heroine is under.

Another scene that reinforces the archetype of blurred reality occurs during the ball, where Annaleigh feels strange and unreal: *"The room spun around me, colors blurring together like a twisted dream. I couldn't tell where the ground ended and the air began"* [10]. In this scene, reality literally "blurs" in front of Annaleigh, colors become "twisted" and she loses the ability to distinguish between the ground and the air. This creates the impression that the world around her is becoming distorted, and the boundaries between the real and the fictional are blurred. The ball, which at first glance seems real, eventually turns into a chaotic, uncertain space, which reinforces the feeling that Annaleigh is trapped between a dream and reality.

Another important moment that demonstrates the boundary between reality and illusion are the scenes where Annaleigh sees visions or hears sounds that seem to come from another world. In one such scene, she confesses: *"I kept hearing whispers, soft murmurs that seemed to drift out of the walls, and I couldn't tell if it was my mind playing tricks on me"* [10]. Here we see how Annaleigh cannot distinguish whether these whispers are real or just a figment of her overworked mind. The shadows and voices coming from behind the walls become a metaphor for her psychological state, as these sounds increase her sense of loneliness and insecurity, making her question her own sanity.

This archetype culminates in the moment when Annaleigh faces her own deepest fears and cannot determine where her consciousness ends and reality begins: *"It felt like I was slipping into another world, one made of shadows and echoes, where nothing was real and everything was just beyond my grasp"* [10]. In this quote, Annaleigh literally feels that she is "disappearing" into another world where "nothing was real". This sense of being in a space where "everything is out of reach" emphasizes her disbelief in her ability to control her own life or even her own mind. The reader experiences with her a moment of absolute uncertainty, when Annaleigh seems doomed to live in a world where every element of reality is subject to doubt.

Annaleigh in *House of Salt and Sorrows* is a classic Gothic heroine who embodies the idea of inner struggle, psychological vulnerability and gradual loss of control over

her own life and mind. She finds herself in the center of a series of tragic events that affect her family and witnesses mysterious and eerie phenomena. This is what plunges her into a state of anxiety and doubt, forcing her to reconsider her own perception of reality. With each new loss, Annaleigh becomes more and more vulnerable to fears and doubts, her inner world is filled with suspicions, and her sense of security gradually disappears. This sense of imminent threat becomes part of her consciousness, as she admits: "I couldn't shake the feeling that death was lurking around every corner, waiting to claim the rest of us " [10].

An important feature of Annaleigh is her constant balancing act between reality and the supernatural. She often sees visions that become a source of tension and doubt in her own perception. For example, she admits: "*I kept seeing flashes of faces in the shadows, familiar but distant, like ghosts from a half-forgotten dream* " [10]. This combination of the real and the illusory creates an atmosphere of gothic fantasy, where the supernatural becomes a reflection of the heroine's inner fears. Visions, such as the ghostly faces of her dead sisters, add ambiguity to the story, and the heroine cannot say for sure whether it is her imagination or real supernatural phenomena.

As a typical Gothic heroine, Annaleigh faces not only external threats but also her own internal fears. Her reflections on the deaths of her sisters, her suspicions about the curse that haunts her family, and the mysteries she cannot understand become a source of constant psychological stress. For example, she says: "*I felt like I was slipping away, like I was losing pieces of myself to the shadows around me* ". [10] In this quote, we can see how Annaleigh feels that she is losing herself, that the darkness around her is literally swallowing her up. This reinforces the feeling of internal disintegration, where each new event distances her from her own self, deepening her psychological conflict.

Annaleigh also corresponds to the Gothic archetype because of her internal struggle with paranoid thoughts and fears. She faces the feeling that she is starting to lose herself and fears that supernatural events are affecting her mind. This is evident in her reflections: "*I felt like I was slipping away, losing parts of myself to the darkness around me* "[10]. This quote reflects her gradual immersion in the feeling that her

personality is becoming vulnerable to invisible forces, and her inner world is gradually losing its integrity.

At the same time, her immersion in a world of visions and paranoia creates an atmosphere of distrust that affects her relationships with others. Her family members begin to seem strange and mysterious, and Annaleigh cannot trust even those closest to her. She confesses: *"I couldn't tell who I could trust anymore, not even my own family"* [10]. This moment emphasizes Annaleigh's isolation, not only physically but also emotionally, when she feels like a stranger even among her own family. This reinforces the feeling that she is truly alone in her struggle against unexplained forces.

In addition, Annaleigh displays classic introspection, often reflecting on her feelings and experiences, which adds depth to her as a Gothic heroine. She feels lonely and misunderstood even among her family: *"I felt as if I were on the edge of something terrible, alone in my fear"* [10]. This sense of isolation increases her vulnerability and emphasizes her loneliness in the face of fear, which is typical of the Gothic character.

Annaleigh's father, Duke Eulalie, embodies the classic Gothic archetype of the patriarchal figure, who, symbolizing power and control, at the same time becomes a source of psychological tension and alienation for the protagonist. In Gothic works, the patriarch is often portrayed as a strict and distant father who, even though he is formally the head of the family, is not always aware of or in control of the internal tragedies and secrets that destroy the family from within. This creates a sense of isolation and vulnerability for the younger members of the family, including Annaleigh. Duke Eulalie embodies all of these traits: he tries to maintain the appearance of control over the situation, but his aloofness only deepens his daughter's isolation.

This is clearly seen in the moment when Annaleigh describes his attitude to the series of deaths in the family: *"Father would not speak of it. Every time I brought up the deaths, he turned away, insisting we move forward and leave the past behind"* [10]. Duke Eulalie avoids discussing the losses, trying to leave them in the past. This emphasizes his reluctance to delve into the traumatic events, leaving Annaleigh alone

in her fears and doubts. The father's refusal to discuss the problems creates an atmosphere of psychological pressure that leaves his daughter alone with her emotional experiences, reinforcing her isolation.

In addition, his marriage to Morella after the death of his first wife introduces an additional element of tension, especially because of her unclear motives. Annaleigh recognizes this, noting: *"He seemed blind to the unease that Morella brought to our home. Father thought her presence would heal us, but it only deepened the cracks in our family"* [10]. Duke Eulalie, trying to heal the family through marriage, only increases the sense of alienation and distrust among his daughters. His attempts to reorganize the family without taking into account its needs only deepen the gap between him and the children. This reinforces the classic Gothic archetype, where the father figure, instead of uniting the family, becomes a source of discord.

Another important quote emphasizes his desire for external control without understanding the internal crisis in the family: *"He insisted that we continue with life as usual, hosting parties and pretending that everything was fine. But our home felt hollow, as if a darkness had seeped into its very walls"* [10]. Duke Eulalie insists that the family continue their social duties as if nothing had happened and receive guests in an effort to maintain a semblance of normalcy. However, Annaleigh feels that their home is filled with darkness and emptiness, reflecting the gap between the appearance and the reality. This reflects the gothic contrast between appearance and inner devastation, where the father acts as a symbol of superficial stability, under which there is a hidden threat.

Thus, Duke Eulalie embodies the classic Gothic archetype of the patriarch, who strives for control and order, but in fact only reinforces the atmosphere of danger and alienation. His aloofness, his desire to silence the tragedies taking place in the house, and the conflict between external stability and internal darkness create an atmosphere of psychological isolation for Annaleigh. He acts as a tragic figure who, despite his position and power, is unable to save his family from the secrets and forces that destroy it from within, enhancing the Gothic atmosphere and creating tension in the plot.

The next character is Morella, Annaleigh's stepmother in *House of Salt and Sorrows*, who embodies the Gothic archetype of the mysterious and potentially sinister stepmother who brings an atmosphere of mistrust, fear, and hidden threat to the family. Like many Gothic characters of this type, she is a figure who, on the one hand, acts as a part of the family, but at the same time evokes a sense of danger and alienation. Her appearance in Annaleigh's house after a series of deaths among the sisters exacerbates the atmosphere of doubt and anxiety, and her true motives remain unclear, which reinforces the family's sense of paranoia and distrust.

One of the important quotes that emphasizes Morella's impact on the family is as follows: "*Morella's presence was like a shadow stretching across our lives, filling every corner with an unease we couldn't shake*" [10]. This description shows how Morella's presence affects the emotional state of the characters, especially Annaleigh, who feels that her stepmother literally "shadows" their lives. This image of a shadow filling the house creates the sense that Morella is not just a new member of the family, but a force that brings darkness and unease with it. In Gothic literature, such characters are often metaphors for hidden threats that may appear virtuous or pleasant, but are also dangerous.

Morella also embodies the archetype of a "seductress" who uses her beauty and charm to influence Duke Eulalie and gain his trust, while remaining a hostile figure to Annaleigh. This is evident in the moment when Annaleigh reflects on her stepmother's influence on her father: "*Father was enchanted by her, blind to the chill she brought into our lives*" [10]. In this quote, Annaleigh indicates that Morella has the power to enchant her husband, and Annaleigh's father does not notice her influence on the atmosphere in the house. This creates an additional conflict, because Duke Eulalie does not understand what Annaleigh sees, and this isolates the heroine, leaving her alone with her doubts. The archetypal "seductress" who wins favor through her external attractiveness is often a figure in Gothic literature who hides her true intentions, which enhances the eeriness.

Another important aspect of Morella's character is her aloofness and the sense of mystery she brings with her. Annaleigh describes her as a figure who is not part of their world: "*She was like a stranger in our own home, beautiful and cold, a figure from a nightmare hidden beneath a polished smile*" [10]. This quote emphasizes that Morella seems to Annaleigh to be a strange, even hostile figure, which adds to the gothic tension. Despite the fact that Morella is officially part of the family, she is not truly "one of the family" and looks like a fake, "polished" figure on the outside, hiding something dark and unexplainable. This gives the impression that she is an outsider, even when she lives under the same roof as Annaleigh, which reinforces the feeling of distrust.

Toward the end, it becomes clear that Morella has her own hidden agenda, and her behavior becomes increasingly suspicious. Annaleigh notes: "*There was something calculating in her eyes, as if she was playing a game only she knew the rules to*" [10]. This description hints that Morella manipulates others by acting in accordance with her secret plan. This gothic archetype of the manipulative stepmother creates the feeling that the character constantly hides her true intentions and acts in ways that do not coincide with the good of the family.

Thus, Morella is the embodiment of a classic Gothic archetype - a mysterious and sinister stepmother who brings an atmosphere of fear and distrust to the house. Her image as a cold and charming, but alien figure creates an additional level of tension in the story, as Annaleigh feels that she cannot trust her stepmother. Morella is a figure who, despite her outward attractiveness, conceals dark intentions and exacerbates Annaleigh's psychological isolation, making the story more gothic and dark.

Another equally interesting character, Cassius, the mysterious character and romantic interest of Annaleigh in *House of Salt and Sorrows*, embodies the classic Gothic archetype of the mysterious stranger who brings with him a sense of intrigue, danger, and mistrust. Like many characters of this type in Gothic literature, Cassius is a figure who simultaneously attracts and alarms the heroine, offering her a sense of protection, but also raises doubts about his true intentions. His appearance in

Annaleigh's life creates an additional level of tension, as he is a mystery that the heroine is trying to solve.

One of the first characteristics of Cassius is his aloofness and inaccessibility. He appears in Annaleigh's life as a mysterious stranger with a dark past who seems to know more about her situation than he reveals at the beginning. In Gothic works, such a stranger figure often acts as a kind of catalyst that encourages the protagonist to discover new, darker sides of her life. Annaleigh notes: *"There was something about him that felt both comforting and dangerous, as if he carried secrets that could either save or destroy me"* [10]. This description emphasizes his duality as a figure that can be trusted but also feared. Cassius becomes not only a source of romantic interest for Annaleigh, but also a challenge that makes her question her perceptions.

Cassius also fulfills the archetypal role of the "savior" - he appears in Annaleigh's life at the moment when she needs support the most, but at the same time remains a figure who does not reveal all his intentions and motives. This is especially evident in the moment when Annaleigh recognizes that Cassius is the only one who understands her fears and anxieties: *"With him, I felt as though I didn't have to pretend. He saw through my fear and confusion, and for the first time, I felt truly understood"* [10]. Cassius, like many mysterious strangers in Gothic works, gives the heroine the feeling that he understands her, which adds to his aura of attractiveness. However, this closeness also increases her doubts, as Annaleigh begins to fear that his attention has an ulterior motive.

In another important moment, Cassius reveals himself as a man who can see more than others, having the ability to perceive the supernatural. Annaleigh notes: *"Cassius had a way of looking at things that no one else could see, as if the shadows whispered to him"* [10]. This description shows that Cassius has a special connection to the dark, mysterious forces surrounding the Annaleigh family. As a character with hidden knowledge, he acts not just as a romantic interest, but also as a guide to the world of the unknown, which enhances the gothic atmosphere of the novel. The reader, along



with Annaleigh, doubts whether Cassius really wants to help or is part of the dark force that haunts her family.

This image culminates in the moment when Cassius begins to act in such a way that Annaleigh no longer knows whether to trust him. She notes: "*It was as if he was both my protector and my captor; the line between friend and foe blurring every time I looked into his eyes* " [10]. This description emphasizes his ambivalence and the blurring of the lines between protector and threat, which is characteristic of the Gothic archetype of the mysterious stranger. Cassius appears as a figure in a complex balance between light and darkness, constantly testing Annaleigh's trust, while promising salvation and concealing danger.

In general, Cassius in *House of Salt and Sorrows* plays the role of an archetypal mysterious stranger who embodies intrigue, potential danger, and ulterior motives. His image enhances the gothic atmosphere of the novel, creating a constant sense of uncertainty and anxiety in Annaleigh. Through Cassius, the author uses the classic technique of Gothic literature, where the hero cannot fully trust even those who seek to help her.

Fisher, Annaleigh's longtime friend in *House of Salt and Sorrows*, stands in contrast to Cassius and embodies the archetype of the "trusted friend" who brings a sense of stability and normalcy. His image is an important part of the novel's Gothic dynamics, as it reveals the contrast between Annaleigh's normal life and the supernatural threats that begin to dominate her world. Fisher symbolizes the possibility of returning to a normal life, without dangers and frightening events, but at the same time his presence complicates the heroine's choice between stability and intrigue, which Cassius represents.

At the beginning of the novel, Fisher appears as a positive character with whom Annaleigh has a long history of friendship. She recalls: "*With Fisher, everything felt easy. There were no mysteries, no shadows lurking in the corners-just the comfort of someone who knew me as I was* " [10]. This quote emphasizes the sense of calm and

ordinariness associated with Fisher. He is the part of Annaleigh's life that has remained unchanged despite the tragedies happening around her. His simplicity and sincerity give her a sense of security that she lacks in her world filled with supernatural events and uncertainty.

The Fisher in *House of Salt and Sorrows* truly fits the gothic fantasy genre, even though his image is lighter and more stable than the other characters. Although he symbolizes normalcy and safety, his role in the novel enhances the gothic atmosphere because of his constant loyalty to Annaleigh and his willingness to enter the dangerous world that gradually unfolds before her. Like many characters in Gothic fantasy, Fisher is drawn into events that are beyond his understanding, and his devotion makes him vulnerable to forces beyond his control.

This characterization is reflected in his determination to help Annaleigh, even when things get strange and scary. He says: *"I'm not going anywhere, Annaleigh. Whatever this is, we'll face it together"* [10]. Here we see the Gothic trait of loyalty, which is inherent in many heroes who become unwitting participants in supernatural events because of their feelings for the protagonist. Fisher is not aware of the danger, but his desire to support Annaleigh pushes him into the world of shadows and secrets, which are classic elements of Gothic literature.

In addition, Gothic fantasy often focuses on a sense of loss and inevitability, which distances the characters from normal life. In the case of Fisher, his presence creates for Annaleigh a contrast between a life that could be ordinary and stable and her true reality, full of threats and fear. Throughout the novel, Annaleigh notes how she feels safe with Fisher, but doubts whether this feeling can overcome the impact of the darkness that surrounds her: *"Being with Fisher was like stepping back into the light, away from the darkness that had begun to consume my life. But I couldn't help feeling that the shadows would always follow"* [10]. This quote emphasizes Annaleigh's gothic dilemma, where even the closeness of a stable friend cannot completely rid her of the feeling of inevitability of the dark forces that haunt her.

Fisher also acts as a kind of “victim” of Gothic fantasy. Because of his love and devotion to Annaleigh, he is gradually immersed in a world where his life is in danger. Giving up a safe life to help the heroine is a classic element of the Gothic genre, where reliable and stable characters are drawn into dangerous events through their connection with cursed or persecuted heroes.

Thus, Fisher, although not a typical character in Gothic literature due to his lighter nature, is still fully consistent with Gothic fantasy. He acts as a personification of stability, which enhances the contrast between light and darkness that haunts Annaleigh. His loyalty makes him vulnerable to forces he does not fully understand, and he is gradually drawn into dark events, reflecting the Gothic theme of sacrifice and doom.

Annaleigh's sisters in *House of Salt and Sorrows* play a central role in the development of the plot and enhance the gothic atmosphere of the novel. Not only do they add a psychological dimension to the story, as each of their deaths evokes feelings of loss and guilt in Annaleigh, but they also become a symbol of the fatal curse that hangs over the family. Their deaths become mysterious, non-random events that support the sense of doom and inevitability that permeates the entire work.

At the beginning of the novel, several of the sisters have already died, and these losses leave a deep emotional mark on Annaleigh, who feels a constant fear of the next loss. Their presence in Annaleigh's life remains even after their deaths, when she feels as if they are with her. Annaleigh recalls: *"Sometimes, I could almost feel them near me, like ghosts haunting the corners of our home"* [10]. This reinforces the gothic element of ghosts and subconscious fears, as even the dead sisters become an integral part of Annaleigh's life, reflecting the constant threat and sense of loss that haunts her.

Each of the sisters has a unique character that allows Annaleigh to see them as individuals, not just victims of a curse. For example, the eldest sister **Camille** is known for her loyalty to her family and her strength of will, but her death is perceived as an inevitable burden on the family. The younger **Verity**, who has an extraordinary

sensitivity to the world, sees things that others overlook and often feels the presence of the supernatural, which frightens her. Her fears and visions add an element of the supernatural when she sees ghosts or feels mysterious forces surrounding their estate: "*Verity often claimed to see shadows in the mirrors, figures that none of us could discern* " [10]. Her visions become important elements of the plot, emphasizing that the family may indeed be haunted by invisible forces.

Each death also creates an atmosphere of fear and paranoia in the house, as each family member expects that he or she could be the next victim. This feeling reinforces the theme of a curse on the family as the sisters die one by one in mysterious circumstances. Annaleigh points this out: "*Our family seemed doomed, as if some unseen hand was set on snuffing us out, one by one* " [10]. This quote emphasizes Annaleigh's powerlessness before the fatal force that takes her sisters and gradually destroys the family. The sisters become the embodiment of the Gothic archetype of the curse, which takes the lives of the family without explanation or possibility of escape.

In addition, their deaths create an emotional burden of guilt and responsibility for Annaleigh. She often feels that she could have done more to protect them, and this feeling adds another gothic theme - the constant guilt that destroys the hero's soul. Annaleigh says: "*I felt as though their deaths were my fault, as if somehow I had failed them* " [10]. This feeling of guilt for each dead sister becomes a psychological trap for Annaleigh, adding depth to her internal conflict and alienation from the world.

Thus, Annaleigh's sisters in *House of Salt and Sorrows* are an integral part of the novel's Gothic atmosphere. They represent both the archetype of a family curse that takes the lives of loved ones and create a psychological conflict for Annaleigh because of her guilt and fear of losing someone else. Their role as ghosts haunting Annaleigh adds supernatural tension to the plot, and their deaths constantly remind us of the inevitability and fatality that are characteristic of Gothic fantasy.

## 2.2. Space and atmosphere of the novel: symbolism and functions

Space plays an extremely important role in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, as it functions not only as a backdrop for the development of events, but also as a deep symbol that reflects the psychological state of the characters and enhances the gothic atmosphere of the work. The island, where the Annaleigh family estate is located, becomes a kind of trap for the characters, separating them from the outside world and condemning them to a constant presence in a place where tragic events repeat themselves over and over again. The remoteness and isolation of the island reinforce the sense of doom of the characters, who remain trapped in their fears and cannot escape the pressure of forces that seem invisible and incomprehensible.

In *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, the island is not only a physical location, but also a symbol of isolation and inevitable fate that consumes the characters. In Gothic fantasy, isolated spaces often have a double meaning: they both protect the characters from the outside world and limit them, creating a sense of isolation and doom. The island on which Annaleigh Manor is located becomes the embodiment of this principle-as if nature itself silences and isolates the characters, forcing them to live under the pressure of invisible forces from which they cannot escape.

An important symbol in the novel is the sea, which surrounds the island and acts as a kind of “river of oblivion,” dividing the world of Annaleigh and her family from the rest of the world. The sea becomes a kind of boundary between reality and the supernatural, separating the characters from the outside world and creating an effect of remoteness that enhances the Gothic atmosphere. Annaleigh feels this environment with anxiety as she watches the sea: *“The waves crashed against the cliffs, as if warning us that escape was not an option ”* [10]. This feeling that “escape is not an option” emphasizes the idea of an invisible trap that the sea creates around the characters, keeping them within the island and symbolizing hopelessness and doom.

In addition, the space of the island increases the psychological pressure on Annaleigh, as every part of the island landscape reminds her of the tragic events that happened to her family. In gothic fantasy, such a “cursed” place emphasizes the sense

of inevitability - every corner of the estate and every wave crashing against the rocks seems to hold the memory of loss. Annaleigh confesses: "*No matter how hard I tried to leave the darkness behind, the island always pulled me back, as if it had a grip on my soul*". The island here embodies the very idea of a curse that stretches from the past and does not allow the heroine to escape from the trap of fear and sadness.

The mystery of the sea also enhances the Gothic aspect of the novel, as its depths become a symbol of darkness and uncertainty, which frighten and at the same time attract the heroine. Annaleigh describes the sea as a living, almost hostile force: "*The sea felt alive, as if it held secrets darker and older than anything we could comprehend*" [10]. Here, the sea becomes a metaphor for all the hidden fears and unexplained events that the heroine is trying to understand. This personification of nature as an otherworldly force corresponds to the classic motif of Gothic fantasy, where natural elements embody supernatural and uncanny phenomena.

Thus, the isolated island in *House of Salt and Sorrows* symbolizes the Gothic space, which reinforces the isolation of the characters and creates a sense of isolation, hopelessness, and fatality. This place appears not only as a physical limitation, but also as a psychological barrier that does not allow Annaleigh and her family to free themselves from their fears and memories.

The mansion in *House of Salt and Sorrows* is the embodiment of the classic Gothic symbol of an unknown and dangerous space, where every element of the space reinforces the feeling of paranoia, anxiety and isolation. The house does not just surround Annaleigh, but becomes an active force that affects her psychological state, clouding her thoughts and creating a constant feeling of the presence of invisible forces.

From the moment we first meet Annaleigh within the walls of the mansion, it becomes clear that a house is not just a place to live; it lives its own life and influences its inhabitants. The walls and corridors have a special "memory" full of tragedies that have happened in the family. Annaleigh says it this way: "*Each room carried an echo of those we'd lost, as if the walls themselves mourned with us*" [10]. This is reminiscent

of the motif of space memory characteristic of the Gothic genre, where every corner of the house holds memories of past losses. The walls of the house seem to have absorbed all the tragedies of the family, turning the space into an eternal witness of suffering and pain, which does not allow Annaleigh to feel safe.

The darkness and shadows that fill the mansion create the feeling that there is always something hidden in this space. Annaleigh recalls: "*The shadows seemed to breathe, alive with secrets they weren't ready to tell*" [10]. In this description, darkness is presented as alive, capable of independent existence. This description is typical of Gothic symbolism, where darkness is not just the absence of light, but an active force that embodies fear and anxiety. These shadows seem to be watching Annaleigh, reinforcing her suspicions and paranoia and confronting her with the unknown.

In addition, the mansion creates a sense of confinement, reinforcing Annaleigh's fear of being unable to escape from family tragedies and dark forces. She confesses: "*There was nowhere to escape; the house seemed to pull me deeper into its grasp with every passing day*" [10]. This space acts as a kind of cage that psychologically pressures the heroine and makes her isolated, even when she is surrounded by her family. The mansion becomes a kind of trap that, instead of protecting her, only reinforces her fears, turning her home into a source of danger.

The sound in the mansion also plays a symbolic role, adding a new level of anxiety. Annaleigh hears fuzzy sounds in the silence that make her nervous: "*The walls creaked and murmured, as if they held secrets they couldn't quite contain*" [10]. In this fragment, the walls have a living ability to communicate, transmitting messages to the heroine that remain inaccessible to her understanding. Noise and creaking cause her anxiety, as if the house is warning of a danger that Annaleigh is unable to unravel. This technique is typical of Gothic fantasy, where sound and silence create an additional level of tension and an unexplained threat.

An important element of Gothic symbolism is also the feeling that the house is "watching" the heroine, creating constant pressure on her psyche. Annaleigh notes:

*"There was always a sense of eyes in the shadows, watching, lurking just out of sight "* [10]. This description creates an atmosphere of constant paranoia, when the heroine cannot feel at ease in any corner of the house. The feeling that she is being watched increases her internal tension and reminds her of the impossibility of escaping from her fear and the danger that threatens her family.

Thus, the mansion in *House of Salt and Sorrows* functions as a gothic space that reminds us of the danger that exists nearby and cannot be fully seen or understood. It is not just a place of action, but a metaphor for the unknown and dangerous, which increases the emotional pressure on Annaleigh and becomes a symbol of her psychological fears. Through these elements, the space of the manor becomes a living embodiment of Gothic themes of isolation, paranoia, and the inability to escape doom.

The atmosphere in *House of Salt and Sorrows* plays the role of a powerful psychological tool that not only reflects Annaleigh's inner state, but also intensifies her emotional experience, creating the feeling that the entire space of the house and the island becomes part of her fears and depression. The house, the sea, and the silence surrounding it turn her reality into a vicious circle of anxiety, with no room for escape or relief.

The silence in the manor becomes a symbol of alienation and fear of the unknown, and this tension weighs heavily on the heroine. Annaleigh describes how *"the silence of the halls felt oppressive, as if the house itself was holding its breath, waiting for something dark to unfold"* [10]. Here, silence turns into a living, almost hostile force that hangs in the air, filling the space of the house with uncertainty and a sense of danger. This creates the effect of constant expectation, which makes Annaleigh feel like a hopeless trap. She seems to be in a state of psychological siege, where even silence has pressure and weight, affecting her mental state.

The darkness and shadows in the mansion also play a significant role in creating an atmosphere of paranoia. They constantly remind the heroine of the secrets that surround her life. Annaleigh describes the shadows as follows: *"Shadows clung to the*



walls like phantoms, slipping in and out of sight, as if they were hiding secrets too dark to reveal ” [10]. The shadows in this description are not just part of the lighting in the house - they have their own, almost conscious character. Their volatility and ghostliness reflect the state of Annaleigh, who feels that she cannot trust even her own senses. Each shadow becomes a symbol of the invisible fear and pain she feels, reminding her of the constant environment of the unknown and dangerous.

The house also becomes a place of tragic memory, with every corner bearing the emotional imprint of those the family has lost. Annaleigh feels this very acutely: *"The house felt empty, yet suffocating at the same time, as if every room was filled with the weight of our lost ones, their spirits never truly at rest "* [10]. This feeling of the room being “saturated” with the ghosts of the past adds to the gothic tension, when even the walls and rooms become symbols of the emotional burden that prevents Annaleigh from letting go of the tragedies of the past.

The surrounding landscape, in particular the sea, reinforces the feeling of inevitability and helplessness. The sounds of the sea crashing against the rocks become a constant reminder of forces beyond her control. Annaleigh describes it as something eternal, reminiscent of doom: *"The sea roared against the cliffs, a constant reminder of something dark and unyielding, a force we could never control or escape "* [10]. The sea here becomes a metaphor for the forces that the heroine is unable to master, and at the same time reflects her powerless state, when fate does not depend on her decisions, and fear of the unknown becomes a constant companion.

Thus, the atmosphere in the novel creates not only a tense background for the events, but also symbolizes Annaleigh's psychological state. Silence, shadows, a depressed feeling of isolation, and the sound of the sea all turn into elements of the Gothic space that becomes part of her personal tragedy. Through the atmosphere, Craig skillfully conveys a sense of doom, inevitability and isolation that overshadow the heroine's life, turning her reality into a reflection of her own fears and reinforcing the novel's gothic tone.

Next point to notice is sea. The sea in *House of Salt and Sorrows* carries a rich symbolism that echoes Annaleigh's emotional state, creating a gothic atmosphere that permeates the entire story. It's not just a landscape element, but a whole element that reminds us of the invisible forces that affect the heroine and her family, increasing isolation, fear and a sense of doom. With each new wave that crashes against the rocks, the sea acts as a judge and torture chamber, cutting off the characters from any hope of escape.

From the very beginning, the sea acts as a symbol of the characters' powerlessness in the face of the inevitable. It constantly reminds Annaleigh that there is no escape from the dark past: "*The waves crashed against the cliffs, as if warning us that escape was not an option* " [10]. This image of the sea, which threatens and at the same time holds the characters, creates a sense of trapping that gives them no chance of escape. The sea seems to have a will of its own, acting as an invisible wall that holds Annaleigh in the arms of her own fear and helplessness. This depiction of the water element is reminiscent of the classic Gothic motif of a confined space where the characters are trapped by unknown and dark forces that control their lives.

This element also represents the mystery and uncertainty that permeates the life of Annaleigh and her family. The depths of the sea are perceived by the heroine as something that hides ancient and dark secrets: "*The sea felt alive, as if it held secrets darker and older than anything we could comprehend* " [10]. This image of the sea reinforces the gothic element of the unknown and dangerous, adding depth to Annaleigh's feelings. For her, the sea is not just a physical force, but a powerful element that hides secrets, perhaps related to the fate of her family. This constant feeling of something inaccessible and unknowable creates a fear of the past and the future in the heroine, turning the sea into a symbol of her own invisible burdens and inner demons that she cannot overcome.

The constant noise of the sea, its endless movement, reinforces the sense of inevitability and doom that Annaleigh faces. The sea becomes a symbol of fate, which seems to "pull" her into its depths: "*The endless waves seemed to pull at the edges of*

*our world, dragging us down into a darkness we could never escape* ” [10]. This description reinforces the Gothic symbolism of the sea as a trap that inevitably attracts and swallows everything that dares to approach it. The sea becomes a metaphor for the dark events that repeat themselves over and over again in Annaleigh's life, confirming that her family will never be able to free themselves from the tragedies that haunt them.

Annaleigh's connection to the sea becomes especially clear in moments when she describes it as a part of herself, reflecting her inner chaos and fear. She confesses: *"The ocean was wild and unpredictable, mirroring the turmoil within me* ” [10]. This comparison reinforces the heroine's emotional connection with the element, which becomes not just an external environment, but a reflection of her inner experiences and anxieties. The sea becomes a metaphor for her state of mind, her fears and insecurities, and at the same time it embodies the power that Annaleigh is forced to accept, because she cannot control this inner chaos in the same way that she cannot tame the elements.

Thus, the sea in *House of Salt and Sorrows* functions not only as a natural environment, but also as a personification of Annaleigh's deep emotional states, symbolizing fear, secrets, doom, and inevitability. This sea is a living, breathing element that constantly influences the heroine, forcing her to face her own fears and powerlessness in the face of forces she cannot control. The sea becomes an invisible participant in the events, an active part of her inner struggle, reminding her that it is impossible to escape from some secrets and fears, just as it is impossible to stop the waves that keep crashing against the rocks of the island.

As a result, the space and atmosphere in *House of Salt and Sorrows* create a complex Gothic world where every element of the environment has a deep symbolic meaning. The isolated island and the Annaleigh family estate embody the ideas of isolation and doom, becoming a physical and psychological barrier for the characters. The manor, with its darkness and mysterious shadows, serves not only as a backdrop for the events, but also as a living embodiment of the fear and burden of past tragedies that haunt each inhabitant. The sea, which constantly surrounds the island, adds to the

feeling of insurmountable isolation and fatal inevitability, as if all fears and secrets remain hidden in its depths, from which there is no escape.

The atmosphere in the novel increases the emotional pressure on the characters, especially on Annaleigh, whose inner state is reflected in the sounds of the waves, the darkness of the corridors, and the feeling of constant danger. Every element of the space - from the sound of the sea to the deafening silence of the estate - becomes part of her psychological burden, symbolizing the fears she cannot overcome. Thus, the space and atmosphere in the novel shape not only the physical but also the emotional isolation of the characters, making Annaleigh's story a reflection of deep internal conflicts and invisible threats that seem to control their fates.

### **2.3 The relationship between folklore and the supernatural in the novel**

In Erin Craig's *House of Salt and Sorrows*, folklore and the supernatural are combined in such a way that they become an integral part of the characters' lives, shaping their worldview and determining their actions. These elements immerse the reader in a world where the boundaries between reality and legend are blurred, heightening the sense of mystery and fear. The folklore motifs are not just a decoration here, but are deeply woven into the structure of the world surrounding Annaleigh and her family. They add realism and believability to the story, creating a world where supernatural events are perceived as an organic part of the characters' existence, not as something alien.

The author subtly uses folklore to convey a sense of inevitability and fatality that permeates the lives of Annaleigh and her family. Local legends and tales become not just fascinating stories for the characters, but evidence of a hidden force that controls their fate. The supernatural elements represent threats that cannot be fully understood or avoided, and which make this world unpredictable and dangerous. In this context, folklore serves as a means of explaining what is beyond the limits of rational perception, and at the same time becomes the basis for beliefs and fears that are deeply rooted in the minds of the characters.

Through this interconnection of folklore and the supernatural, Craig conveys the condition of the characters, who are constantly forced to live in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, where the past, the otherworldly, and the real are intertwined. Folklore motifs become a way of expressing not only fears but also hopes, because for Annaleigh and her family, the supernatural is both a source of danger and an opportunity to find answers to mysteries they cannot otherwise explain.

The image of the curse that weighed on the Annaleigh family is not only an element of the Gothic atmosphere, but also deeply rooted in folkloric ideas about generational doom. In Craig's novel, the curse has folkloric roots that echo ancient ideas that the mistakes or sins of ancestors can be passed on to subsequent generations, turning into an invisible but irresistible force. Just as in folk tales and legends, fate often haunts entire families, in *House of Salt and Sorrows*, this curse dooms the Annaleigh family

to a series of unexplained deaths that gradually destroy the family and isolate it from the outside world.

The folkloric image of the curse embodies the idea of hereditary responsibility, which is transferred to each new generation, regardless of its guilt. Annaleigh feels that the shadow of the curse only grows stronger with each new tragedy: *"It felt as though a shadow hung over us, one that grew darker with each sister we lost"* [10]. This sense of a "shadow" is reminiscent of folk beliefs where a curse follows a family like an invisible fate, which inevitably leads to tragedies. In folklore, such curses often become a way of explaining the unknown and tragic, and in the novel, this concept deeply affects the characters' consciousness, forcing them to see each new death as a confirmation of the inevitability of their situation.

The curse also functions as a symbol of inevitability and mystery, which are often found in folklore stories about "cursed" places or families. In the novel, Annaleigh's estate is perceived by the characters as part of this fate. She feels that every corner of the house seems to absorb the pain and suffering of her family: *"The walls themselves seemed to carry the weight of every life lost, every sorrow ever whispered within them"* [10]. This folkloric idea of houses as witnesses and carriers of the memory of the past that influences the future adds Gothic symbolism to the story. The walls of the house become like living witnesses that support the existence of the curse and remind the characters of their fate, intertwined with the afterlife.

The folkloric concept of the curse is also manifested in the expectation of new tragedies, which indicates a belief in a predetermined fate where the characters cannot escape their situation. Annaleigh describes it as follows: *"We walked on eggshells, waiting for the next tragedy, as if destiny itself was playing a cruel game with us"* [10]. This is reminiscent of folk stories about families doomed to eternal suffering or punishment for sins, where victims cannot escape the next trial. In the novel, this concept of fatality, reinforced by folklore motifs, becomes part of the characters' worldview and defines their lives as a cycle of constant anxiety and expectation.

The curse also becomes a symbol of folkloric isolation, when the family feels that their tragedies are alienating them from the rest of society. Annaleigh recalls: "*We were like shadows of ourselves, drifting further from everyone else with each tragedy, becoming strangers even to our own hearts*" [10]. In many folk tales, families affected by a curse suffer not only physical losses but also social isolation. In the novel, this curse seems to create a barrier between the family and the rest of the world, turning them into "shadows" that are distant from their own feelings and connections. This isolation is a classic folklore motif that adds another level of gothic tension to the plot and emphasizes the feeling that the characters seem to be separated from their normal lives by a force they cannot overcome.

Folklore in the novel also manifests itself in the form of numerous mythical creatures and images that come to life in Annaleigh's perception. For example, the motif of ghosts in *House of Salt and Sorrows* has a function that goes far beyond mere fear: it reflects the connection between the worlds of the living and the dead, which is deeply rooted in folk beliefs. The ghosts of Annaleigh's sisters, who come to her in dreams and visions, become an important symbol of the unfinished past that haunts the heroine. This is a classic folklore image of the spirits of the dead who appear because of unfinished business or tragic circumstances of death, and in the novel it takes on an additional emotional connotation. The ghosts remind Annaleigh that her family is stuck between two worlds, and until this boundary is crossed, they are doomed to relive their losses over and over again.

Annaleigh feels the constant presence of her sisters in the shadows around her, and this experience is filled with fear and sadness. She recalls: "*They appeared at the edge of my vision, pale and silent, their eyes haunting me with questions they could not ask*" [10]. This description evokes the feeling that the ghosts do not just appear randomly, but carry a certain message that Annaleigh feels but cannot fully understand. This is typical of folkloric stories about ghosts that come from the afterlife to remind us of the past or warn us of danger. The presence of ghosts becomes a constant reminder of the

questions that remain unanswered and the fears that live with the characters, turning their lives into a constant burden.

In addition, the sisters' ghosts symbolize Annaleigh's deep connection to the otherworld, which she fears but is also drawn to. In many folk beliefs, ghosts appear to the living as a way to reveal secrets or remind them of past sins, and in the novel, these encounters become a reflection of those invisible wounds that do not heal over time. Annaleigh feels as if she is drawn into this world of the afterlife, where her sisters, who died under mysterious circumstances, are trying to send her warnings or seek justice. The presence of ghosts adds even more intrigue to the plot, as their uninvited appearances hint at deeper secrets and invisible threats that lie beyond the visible world.

Ghosts in the novel also represent the theme of unfinished lives and restless souls, which is widely reflected in folk tales. Annaleigh realizes that her sisters cannot find peace because of the violent and tragic nature of their deaths, and this adds another level of tension, as the heroine begins to doubt whether her own fate will not lead her to the same end. In such folklore representations, unfinished business and restless souls are considered a sign of a curse or a shadow of the past that prevents the characters from living fully. The ghosts that come to Annaleigh are a reminder that the family story remains unfinished, and these souls wandering between worlds embody the burden of the family curse that follows all who have touched it.

In *House of Salt and Sorrows*, Erin Craig uses several other mythical creatures in addition to ghosts, which enrich the novel with folklore motifs and enhance the atmosphere of gothic fantasy. Craig integrates elements from traditional legends and tales into her work, creating a multilayered world where the supernatural and the ordinary intertwine, affecting the psychological state of the characters and adding a sense of the unknown and dangerous to the story. Among such mythical creatures in the novel, a special place is occupied by sea creatures and mermaids, who personify the characters' connection with the natural elements of the sea and their fear of unexplained forces.



The mermaids depicted in the novel remind the heroine of the power of the sea and that this element carries not only beauty but also a threat. In the folklore of many cultures, mermaids are associated with danger and magic, as they often lure people into the depths and devour their souls. In one of the episodes, Annaleigh sees the shadow of a mermaid among the waves, and it gives her a strong sense of anxiety: *"There was something unnatural in the way the water rippled, as if a creature was lurking just beneath the surface, waiting for its chance to strike"* [10]. Here, the mermaid carries a symbolic meaning of secret fear and hidden threat. This reflects the folklore notions of mermaids as creatures that are between worlds—they seem to live in the water, but at the same time are able to influence people's lives, luring them to their deaths. In the novel, mermaids become a metaphor for those invisible but powerful forces that influence Annaleigh's fate, enhancing the Gothic atmosphere of constant threat.

Another important mythical element is the image of the otherworldly Sea King, who reminds readers of ancient beliefs in underwater gods and demons. In one of the stories, Annaleigh learns that her home island has long honored the Sea King, who was sacrificed to protect her from storms and misfortune. This figure symbolizes the power of the sea, which is beyond control and requires constant honoring. The image of the Sea King adds to the Gothic fantasy the feeling that nature can be not only beautiful but also dangerous, and that it has its own will and power, before which humans are powerless. Annaleigh feels this during the storm: *"The storm roared like a beast awakened, as if the Sea King himself was angry and demanding something in return"* [10]. This moment reflects the idea of a folkloric god who does not forgive disrespect and reminds us of the close connection between the islanders and the sea as a force that must be respected and propitiated.

Craig also weaves into the novel the images of otherworldly nature spirits, which are associated with the mystery and invisible forces that permeate the island. Such spirits often appear in folk beliefs as guardians of certain places, especially remote and wild ones, and are able to influence people's lives. In the novel, these spirits are felt in secluded places on the island, where Annaleigh sometimes hears whispers and strange

sounds that make her feel unsafe. Her description: "*The woods were alive with whispers, voices that seemed to come from nowhere, echoing secrets too dark to comprehend* " [10].reminds us of a classic folklore motif where nature is full of unknown creatures that live in the shadows, invisible and unrecognizable. This atmosphere adds to the gothic tone of the novel, creating the feeling that even natural spaces can be hostile, and the world around Annaleigh is full of spirits that will never make her feel completely safe.

Therefore, the mythical creatures in *House of Salt and Sorrows* embody deep folklore archetypes that add new layers of symbolism and mystery to the story. Through the images of mermaids, the Sea King, and otherworldly spirits, the author conveys the fear of the unknown and the power that influences the characters, regardless of their will. These creatures not only give the story a folkloric character, but also enhance the Gothic atmosphere, creating a sense of an invisible threat that constantly haunts the heroine.

In *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, time is distorted, reality is distorted, and magical spatial traps are linked to folklore, which gives the novel a gothic fantasy feel. These elements reflect traditional notions of a boundary between worlds that transcends ordinary reality and ideas about time traps that are often found in folk tales and myths. Many cultures have folklore stories about places where time flows differently-enchanted forest glades, underwater kingdoms, dance floors where people lose track of time and only realize that years have passed. In Craig's novel, these folkloric ideas are embodied through magical spaces and visions that consume Annaleigh and her sisters, creating a sense of inevitability and tragedy.

One of the most prominent manifestations of folklore influence in the novel is the enchanted balls at which the sisters dance. They are reminiscent of traditional folklore motifs of "losing time" or "being kidnapped by fairies," where people find themselves in the world of fairies, elves, or spirits, dancing and losing control of their lives. This relationship with folklore reinforces the Gothic aspect of the story, as magical spaces become not just beautiful but dangerous, with hidden meanings and fatal effects on the

characters. Annaleigh senses this when, after returning from the ball, she notices how time seems to have “stolen” a part of their lives: *"It was as if we had danced our lives away in that strange, shadowed place"*. [10] This is typical of Gothic fantasy, where the supernatural is not only fascinating but also destructive, disrupting the natural course of life.

In addition, the element of fatality in the novel is manifested in the distortion of time and the impression that the past and present are intertwined, drawing the characters into a cycle of tragedies and repetitive events. Annaleigh describes her feelings as follows: *"It felt as though moments bled into each other, past and present intertwined, blurring where one ended and the other began"* [10]. This perception of time as foggy and unstable reinforces the Gothic tone, as the supernatural is not only embodied in specific beings or events, but also disrupts the very structure of life, keeping the characters trapped in cyclical time. This is reminiscent of the folklore motifs of curses and endless repetition.

Another important folkloric symbol that Craig uses to create Gothic fantasy is mirrors. In many folk tales, they are considered to be a portal to the afterlife or a tool through which spirits can cross the boundary between worlds. In the novel, Annaleigh notices these “shadows” in the mirror, reflecting not only her own fear but also hints of hidden danger: *"I caught a glimpse of something shifting in the mirror, a shadow that didn't belong to me"* [10]. This use of mirrors enhances the gothic atmosphere, making them a symbol of disturbed reality and connection with the otherworldly, which constantly affects the lives of the characters. This adds an element of anxiety that is typical for Gothic works, where the line between the real and the supernatural becomes blurred.

An additional element that emphasizes the connection with folklore beliefs is the feeling that time flows differently in magical spaces. For example, in the scene where Annaleigh and her sisters are dancing in an enchanted place, they feel like time stops and they “waste” part of their lives: *"It was as if we had danced our lives away in that strange, shadowed place, only to return to a world that had changed around us"* [10].

Such a change in the perception of time emphasizes the magical and dangerous aspect of space, and points to the folklore motif of spatial traps and alternative realities, which enriches the novel with elements of Gothic fantasy.

Another interesting folklore motif in *House of Salt and Sorrows* is the theme of sacrifice, which appears in the context of the locals' attitude to the sea and its natural forces. Since the novel is set on an island, the sea is both a life-giving and a threatening force for the islanders, and it requires special honoring. In the folk beliefs of many cultures, the sea often appears as an uncontrollable element that requires sacrifice to appease. Craig emphasizes the connection between the characters' lives and the force that balances between blessing and curse. In the novel, this motif is manifested through the ancient traditions according to which the islanders make symbolic sacrifices to the sea deity, hoping for calm seas and prosperity. Annaleigh notices how locals leave symbolic sacrifices on the seashore, hoping to propitiate the sea god and ensure safety: "*They would leave tokens on the shore, simple offerings meant to appease the waves and ensure our safe return* " [10]. These rituals reinforce the sense of the supernatural that permeates the lives of the islanders, as the sea embodies an otherworldly force that has power over them.

The belief in prophecy and fate is also typical of folklore and manifests itself in the novel in the form of hints of predictions and prophetic dreams of Annaleigh. These dreams create tension and anxiety: "*My dreams had been filled with shadowy images, dark waves crashing and dragging me under, as if the sea itself was sending me warnings* " [10]. This motif reinforces the Gothic tone of the novel, adding a sense of fatality, because the characters cannot escape their fate, even if they see it in advance. This is a typical feature of Gothic fantasy, where fear and uncertainty penetrate the subconscious of the characters, creating a deep connection between the supernatural and their internal struggle.

The motif of "enchanted places," such as the Annaleigh estate and other mysterious spaces of the island, adds an element of uncertainty and the unknown to the atmosphere of the novel. In folk legends, such places are considered "enchanted" and

are often revered or avoided. In the novel, these locations become spaces where the characters encounter the past and the supernatural, making Annaleigh feel connected to family secrets and deeply held fears. This gothic atmosphere reinforces the feeling that the characters live in a world where magic and the supernatural are an integral part of their reality.

Therefore, in *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, the use of folklore motifs such as sacrifices, prophecies, and enchanted places enriches gothic fantasy, giving the novel a special depth and atmosphere. These elements not only create a sense of mystery and anxiety, but also emphasize the powerlessness of the characters in the face of the fatal supernatural forces that control their lives. Folklore images and motifs give the story a touch of inevitability and fatality inherent in Gothic fantasy, where the boundary between reality and the otherworldly always remains uncertain.

## **2.4. Duality of Reality and Fantasy as a Feature of Gothic Fantasy in the Novel**

In *House of Salt and Sorrows*, the duality of reality and fantasy creates an atmosphere of mystery and anxiety, plunging Annaleigh into a constant sense of uncertainty. Her world gradually takes on distorted forms, where even the simplest things become objects of suspicion. The supernatural appears not only as a threat, but as an integral part of everyday life, forming a kind of “parallel world” for the characters. This mixing of worlds creates psychological tension, which is intensified by Annaleigh's internal conflicts, her desire for a rational explanation of all events and her uncertainty that these events can be comprehended by reason.

Gradually, Annaleigh begins to feel that the reality around her no longer follows the usual rules. At moments when she encounters unexplained phenomena, such as the ghosts of her dead sisters or delirious balls that repeat over and over again, the heroine is forced to ask herself whether all this is really happening or just a figment of her imagination. This causes her not only fear, but also deep inner devastation, because Annaleigh can no longer fully trust her own feelings and perceptions.

Craig creates an atmosphere for Annaleigh where fantastical and real events constantly intersect, and this keeps the reader in suspense. Each new manifestation of the supernatural, each frightening image she sees on the periphery of her vision, reinforces this boundary between worlds that exist separately and intersect at the same time. This perception of the world affects her understanding of herself, making her question whether she is merely an observer of supernatural events or an integral participant in them, bearing some guilt or the burden of a family curse.

In the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows*, dance balls occupy a special place in the development of the theme of the duality of reality and fantasy. During these events, Annaleigh immerses herself in a world where music and dance create an atmosphere of euphoria, while simultaneously leading to feelings of anxiety and loss of control. This contrasting feeling emphasizes the gothic nature of the fantasy: festive dances that seem fun and innocent actually become a source of fear and discomfort.

The moment when Annaleigh recalls: "The world seemed to shift around us, the music pulling me deeper into a place where time didn't exist..." [10], reveals the depth of her experiences to the reader. This sentence conveys the sense of disorientation that is caused not only by the music, but also by the process of dance itself. Music becomes a kind of catalyst that leads her to oblivion, bringing an element of magic and illusion to this moment. She feels that reality is blurring, which in turn emphasizes the themes of perception and reality that are central to Gothic fantasy.

These dances can cause Annaleigh not only joy, but also anxiety, because she realizes that this feeling of a "parallel world" can lead to a loss of contact with reality. She can't be sure if what she's experiencing is really happening, or if it's just an illusion created by powerful emotions. This ambiguity heightens the tension and makes her more vulnerable to the supernatural phenomena that surround her.

Dance balls become a symbol of how external events can affect the inner state of the hero. The feeling of joy and freedom in dance becomes an illusion that hides Annaleigh's deep fears and experiences. As a result, these dances become not only a place for socialization, but also a space where reality and fantasy collide, leading to even greater alienation and isolation. Thus, through the experience of dance balls, Craig masterfully shows how the illusion of joy can have profound psychological consequences for the heroine, turning her into a victim of her own inner fears and doubts.

Gradually, the duality of reality and fantasy penetrates into Annaleigh's everyday life, which is manifested in the space of her native Highmoor estate. The estate and the island it sits on become physical manifestations of her growing anxiety, isolation, and sense of uncertainty. The space becomes a place where reality and fantasy constantly intertwine, causing Annaleigh not only to feel fear, but also to question her own perception. Familiar corridors and rooms become strange and ominous for her, every sound or shadow generates new waves of anxiety. For example, she feels that shadows move on their own, as if something invisible is following her, which increases her sense of losing control of reality.

The duality of reality and fantasy is especially vivid when Annaleigh feels that the sea and the estate itself hide unknown threats: "The waves whispered secrets, carrying memories of the lost, as if the sea itself knew things it could never tell" [10]. This sea becomes not just a physical barrier, but a symbol of an invisible, almost living force that carries the memory of the dead and their unknown secrets. Annaleigh feels as if the sea has the ability to not only absorb life, but also hold the memory of the past, which reinforces her sense of isolation and inability to find peace.

This duality is also evident in the descriptions of the estate. For example, Annaleigh notices that some parts of the house retain echoes of past events: she sees wet footprints appear on the floor and disappear, and hears whispers when no one is around. The moment she notices a reflection in the mirror that doesn't quite match her own image, Annaleigh begins to doubt her own sanity: "In the mirror, a figure moved, but it wasn't quite my own. A shadow, a flicker, as if something else was staring back" [10]. This makes her see her life as a sinister illusion, where even ordinary objects hide something more than meets the eye.

This motif of the duality of reality and fantasy is a typical feature of the Gothic genre, as it creates an atmosphere of psychological tension and alienation felt by characters who cannot trust their own perceptions. The Gothic tradition emphasizes the fear of the unknown and the otherworldly, which becomes part of the inner world of the characters, and blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, leaving the characters trapped in their own doubts and anxieties. In *House of Salt and Sorrows*, Craig uses these gothic elements to create a sense of constant threat and uncertainty that keeps both Annaleigh and the reader in a state of tense anticipation. This feature of Gothic fantasy adds a special depth to the plot, where the supernatural becomes not just a source of fear, but an inseparable part of the lives of the heroes, into which they are immersed without the possibility of escape.

Thus, the space of Highmoor and the surrounding sea become powerful tools for creating a dichotomy between reality and fantasy in the novel. In Gothic fantasy, space itself often becomes a source of anxiety and illusion, which traps the characters, where



their reality gradually disappears. Annaleigh finds herself in a situation where even her home, island and familiar things become part of an inevitable force that pulls her into another, dark dimension from which there is no way out.

Another important aspect of the duality of reality and fantasy is the use of mirrors, which in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* act as a portal to the afterlife or an alternate dimension of reality. These mirrors not only show the physical reflection of the characters, but also become a reflection of their inner struggles, fears and hidden desires. Annaleigh often sees shadows or reflections that are not her own, causing her to mistrust her own perceptions and fear the unknown. Such ambiguity of perception strengthens the feeling that reality can be deceptive, and its connection with the other world is much deeper than it seems at first glance.

These mirrors create a kind of "split reality effect," where Annaleigh can't be sure if what she sees in the mirror is real or an illusion. For example, in the scene where she observes how the shadows in the mirror move independently of her movements, this effect is exacerbated: "In the mirror, shadows moved on their own, whispering truths I dared not acknowledge" [10]. Here, the mirror doesn't just reflect the world around her, it becomes a guide into Annaleigh's world of fears and inner conflicts, reminding her that there are forces she can't control or fully comprehend.

Mirrors in the novel can also be interpreted as symbols of the separation between reality and the afterlife, but at the same time they are windows into the subconscious of the characters. For Annaleigh, mirrors become the personification of her fears, which increasingly penetrate the outside world and affect her behavior. They reflect her doubts, her inability to understand what is real and what is just a figment of her imagination. This creates additional psychological pressure on the heroine, because she is not only forced to fight with real threats, but also with her perception, which is becoming more and more unstable.

In general, mirrors in the Gothic tradition have always had a symbolic meaning as "windows" into other realities or reflections of the inner world of heroes. In the context

of gothic fantasy, mirrors become a space where reality and fantasy collide and interpenetrate, creating a new dimension of reality that the characters cannot fully understand or control. In the novel, mirrors become a border that separates the world of the living and the afterlife, but at the same time allows these two worlds to flow into each other. For Annaleigh, every look in the mirror is a reminder of her uncertain fate and doom, as even her own reflection becomes part of this blurred reality, where she cannot separate herself from external threats.

In addition, the island on which the Highmoor estate is located serves as a metaphor for the growing tension and otherworldly nature that blurs the lines between the real and the imagined. As the island is separated from the mainland, so Annaleigh becomes detached from the normal world, which emphasizes her sense of hopelessness and helplessness. She finds herself in a confined space where not only physical barriers but also emotional aspects of isolation shape her experience. Surrounded by raging waters, the island becomes a symbol of an inescapable trap, reinforcing the sense of confinement that grips Annaleigh.

The scene where she realizes that even the surrounding sea "holds within itself the secrets of the dead" [10] emphasizes how nature becomes an active participant in her drama, instead of being merely a background. This sea that surrounds the island is not just a barrier; it is a living, dynamic element that carries the memory of the dead and their unknown secrets. Annaleigh feels that the sea can not only absorb life, but also hold the memory of the past. This idea emphasizes the Gothic motif, where nature and the environment become witnesses of personal tragedies that occur in the lives of the heroes.

Also important is the scene when Annaleigh observes how "the waves crashed against the cliffs, as if warning us that escape was not an option"[10]. Here the sea becomes not only a physical obstacle, but also a symbol of its hopelessness. This image represents the constant threat that hangs over the heroine, giving the impression that she is connected to the island and the sea not only physically, but also emotionally.

Such a sense of helplessness enhances the gothic atmosphere of the novel, where natural elements become part of the psychological drama.

The island also functions as an object of fear, as its remoteness creates a sense of hopelessness for Annaleigh in the face of mysterious forces. Its mysterious landscape, with rocks and dark waters, can be seen as a reflection of her inner anxieties. This creates a dynamic contrast between the outer and inner worlds, where the island symbolizes not only physical isolation, but also deeper psychological barriers that prevent Annaleigh from finding peace in her life.

Thus, the island in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* becomes an important Gothic element that reinforces the themes of anxiety and uncertainty. It is a space where the boundaries between reality and fantasy become vague, and nature itself turns into a witness and an active participant in the tragic events in the life of the heroine. Annaleigh becomes part of this unpredictable world, where the island and the sea not only shape her external environment, but also become a catalyst for her inner struggles and fears.

Thus, the motif of the duality of reality and fantasy in *House of Salt and Sorrows* not only creates tension, but also has a profound effect on the revelation of Annaleigh's inner world. This complication of perception of the surrounding reality emphasizes how psychological factors shape the heroine's reality, calling into question the very foundations of her existence. Annaleigh lives in a world where uncertainty and constant fear of the unknown become integral parts of her life, the environment not only reflects her emotional state, but also actively influences its formation.

This duplicity not only contributes to the creation of a gothic atmosphere, but also allows the reader to plunge into the complex inner world of the heroine. Annaleigh doesn't just encounter the supernatural; she is forced to constantly cope with her fears, which are transformed into invisible but powerful forces that shape her perception of reality. She experiences an internal struggle between reality, in which she tries to find

answers to questions about her past and her place in the world, and fantasy, which tries to distract her from pain and loss.

This conflict between the real and the imagined reinforces the psychological burden Annaleigh faces on a daily basis. Each new supernatural phenomenon she observes challenges her ability to distinguish between what is really happening and what is just a figment of her imagination. In this way, the reader witnesses the evolution of her perception, where efforts to cope with grief and loss become central to her identity.

Therefore, the motif of the duality of reality and fantasy in *House of Salt and Sorrows* is not only an element that heightens the atmosphere of tension, but also an important tool for exploring Annaleigh's complex psychology. This allows the author to explore the themes of fear, loss and hope more deeply, creating a multi-layered structure that enriches the plot and gives it a special depth. In the end, this duality serves as a kind of mirror for the reader, forcing him to think about how the perception of reality can be vulnerable and changeable, especially in the context of Gothic fantasy, where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary are constantly blurred.

## CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 2

In *House of Salt and Sorrows* underscores how Erin Craig intricately weaves traditional Gothic motifs to build a world that is as haunting as it is symbolic of the characters' inner lives. The isolated island setting and the family estate serve not only as a backdrop for the events but also as symbols of the protagonist Annaleigh's entrapment by her family's dark legacy. This isolation, both physical and psychological, is a core Gothic theme that Craig masterfully employs to enhance the sense of confinement and helplessness. The family is literally and metaphorically cut off from the world, with the sea surrounding the island acting as a constant, imposing boundary that restricts the characters' actions and choices. This spatial isolation contributes to an atmosphere of claustrophobia, where every element of the setting reinforces the theme of entrapment, mirroring Annaleigh's inability to escape her family's tragic fate and the cyclical nature of their curse.

The novel's supernatural elements bring an added layer of psychological tension, deeply intertwining with Annaleigh's personal struggles and magnifying her internal conflicts. Her visions of her deceased sisters create a sense of uncertainty and dread that permeates the narrative, as the line between reality and fantasy continually blurs. Annaleigh's supernatural encounters go beyond mere plot devices; they become representations of her grief, guilt, and trauma. The ambiguity surrounding these apparitions—whether they are genuine hauntings or manifestations of her emotional turmoil—adds a layer of complexity to her character. Through this, Craig explores the idea that the supernatural is not just an external force but a reflection of internal fears, adding depth to Annaleigh's psychological journey and contributing to the Gothic tone by creating an atmosphere where the protagonist constantly questions her own sanity.

This analysis also emphasizes the significance of folklore and ritual within the story, which Craig incorporates to great effect in building a broader sense of Gothic unease and timeless dread. The island's inhabitants adhere to superstitions and engage in rituals, such as sacrifices to appease the sea, highlighting a belief system rooted in fear of the unknown. These practices underscore the community's dependence on

tradition as a way of coping with the unseen forces they believe govern their fate. By incorporating folklore, Craig enriches the Gothic atmosphere with a sense of inevitability, linking the family's struggles to a mythic cycle that transcends individual lives and reinforces the theme of predestination. This not only adds to the novel's suspense but also situates the characters within a larger narrative of human helplessness in the face of natural and supernatural forces.

The layered Gothic elements in *House of Salt and Sorrows*—from isolated spaces to spectral visions and deeply embedded folklore—are not merely atmospheric details. They serve as essential narrative tools that Craig uses to explore complex themes of identity, loss, and the psychological effects of trauma. Annaleigh's journey through grief, her struggle with the blurring of reality and fantasy, and her encounters with folklore-driven rituals highlight how the Gothic genre remains a powerful lens for examining human vulnerability. By reimagining Gothic conventions, Craig crafts a story that resonates with contemporary readers, using timeless motifs to address modern themes of alienation, emotional isolation, and the haunting nature of memory. Ultimately, this chapter's examination of Craig's use of Gothic elements reveals how *House of Salt and Sorrows* not only aligns with but also expands upon the Gothic tradition. The novel combines classical Gothic archetypes with a fresh approach, reflecting current societal concerns about fate, psychological resilience, and the unknown. Craig's work stands as a vivid example of how Gothic fantasy can simultaneously honor its origins and evolve to explore the emotional depths of its characters, offering readers a haunting and thought-provoking narrative that bridges past and present.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gothic literature, initially a response to the rational ideals of the Enlightenment, has evolved into a dynamic genre that interweaves themes of psychological depth, supernatural terror, and societal reflection. Emerging with works like *Frankenstein* [53] that introduced isolated, imposing settings, ancestral secrets, and encounters with mysterious forces, Gothic novels laid the groundwork for stories where psychological fear and moral conflict took precedence. Over time, Gothic literature expanded to include complex depictions of family histories, curses, and morally ambiguous characters, enabling a deep dive into the human psyche. These elements allowed readers to confront internal fears and societal questions, making the genre a powerful tool for exploring existential dread, isolation, and the effects of repressed emotions against eerie, symbolic landscapes.

As Gothic literature has moved into contemporary settings, it has adapted to address modern concerns, from environmental anxieties to questions of personal identity. In the current era, Gothic fantasy brings these classic elements into new contexts, creating narratives that blend supernatural threats with real-world fears. Characters' internal struggles are mirrored by decaying landscapes and foreboding environments, where physical and psychological spaces reflect unresolved issues and the constant presence of unease. The genre's enduring appeal lies in its ability to balance supernatural elements with deep psychological insight, questioning reality, morality, and the human experience through atmospheres rich in tension and symbolism.

*House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig [10] stands as a vivid example of how modern Gothic fantasy continues to expand this tradition. Craig skillfully employs Gothic motifs to shape a hauntingly symbolic world around her characters. The novel's isolated island setting and ominous family estate create a claustrophobic backdrop, reinforcing Annaleigh's sense of entrapment within her family's tragic legacy. Through the physical and psychological confinement imposed by these spaces, the narrative conveys an atmosphere where every corner reinforces a sense of inescapable fate.

In addition to this setting, the novel's supernatural elements intensify Annaleigh's psychological struggle, blurring the line between reality and fantasy. Her visions of deceased family members evoke uncertainty, contributing to a layered portrayal of grief, trauma, and inner conflict. The ambiguity of these apparitions transforms them into reflections of Annaleigh's inner fears, enriching her journey and reinforcing the Gothic tone by creating an atmosphere filled with dread and self-doubt.

Folklore and ritual also play a critical role, highlighting the community's reliance on superstition to cope with unseen forces. Through traditional practices, such as sacrifices to the sea, Craig emphasizes the belief in predestination and the struggle against forces beyond human control. These folkloric elements underscore the inevitability that pervades the novel and situate the characters in a timeless cycle of fear and fate.

Ultimately, *House of Salt and Sorrows* demonstrates how Gothic elements can explore themes of identity, loss, and trauma within a contemporary framework. Annaleigh's journey through grief and supernatural encounters reveals a genre that continues to be a compelling lens for examining human vulnerability. Craig's work honors Gothic roots while addressing modern issues, using timeless motifs to discuss alienation, isolation, and the persistent presence of memory. This thesis affirms that Gothic fantasy, through its evolving use of symbolism and psychological complexity, remains a powerful means of exploring human fears and uncertainties, blending the supernatural with psychological and societal reflection.



## **SUMMARY**

This master's thesis conducted an in-depth analysis of the Gothic elements in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, focusing on their impact on the plot, characterisation and overall atmosphere of the novel. The study showed that the modern gothic fantasy presented in Craig's novel uses classic gothic motifs such as the supernatural, death, and isolation to create a tense, intriguing atmosphere and psychological insight into the characters' experiences. This approach allows us to consider the Gothic genre as a form of literature that adapts to the modern requirements of the audience, while keeping its key elements unchanged.

### **Relevance of the study**

The relevance of this work is due to the growing interest in contemporary gothic fantasy, which combines classical themes with the latest cultural and social contexts, adapting them to the current needs of readers. In today's environment of heightened social instability and psychological tension, gothic fantasy is becoming a unique vehicle for exploring such themes as fear of the unknown, alienation, the search for identity, and internal conflict. This makes the genre particularly important in contemporary literature, as it allows readers and authors to explore the issues of personal fears and emotional turmoil in greater depth.

### **The purpose of the study**

This paper aims to explore and analyze the Gothic elements in the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, paying special attention to such topics as the duality of reality and fantasy, the influence of the supernatural, and the use of folklore motifs.

### **Object and subject of the study**

The object of the study is the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* by Erin Craig, and the subject is the key Gothic motifs that serve as means to shape the plot, create psychological tension, and reveal the characters' inner experiences.

### **General conclusions**

The study has shown that Erin Craig's novel is a vivid example of contemporary gothic fantasy that skilfully adapts classic gothic elements to modern conditions. Using traditional Gothic motifs such as death and the supernatural, the author creates a narrative that reveals the deep psychological experiences of the characters and reflects their internal conflicts.

Particularly noteworthy is the theme of the duality of reality and fantasy, which creates an atmosphere of constant tension and uncertainty, when the characters constantly doubt the reality of their feelings and actions.

Folkloric motifs in the novel, such as sacrifices, prophecies and the symbolism of 'enchanted places,' add to the plot's multilayered nature and help immerse the reader in the atmosphere of a mythical world where otherworldly forces play a crucial role. These motifs not only deepen the cultural context of the novel, but also give meaning to the events, emphasising their fatality and inevitability.

Space and atmosphere in the novel also play an important role in creating the Gothic atmosphere. The island and the mansion become not only physical locations, but also a reflection of the heroine's inner world, her fears and inner isolation. This reinforces the feeling that the characters are connected to the space in which they live, and their fate depends on the mysterious and incomprehensible forces that control this space.

In general, the results of the study confirm that the novel *House of Salt and Sorrows* reflects the ability of contemporary gothic fantasy to adapt to modern realities while retaining the key elements of classical gothic. Using the supernatural as a means to explore psychological and social issues, Erin Craig emphasises the importance of the genre as a literary tool that allows exploring topics relevant to the modern reader.

## **РЕЗЮМЕ**

У цій магістерській роботі було здійснено глибокий аналіз готичних елементів у романі "House of Salt and Sorrows" Ерін Крейг, зосереджуючи увагу на їхньому впливі на сюжет, характер героїв і загальну атмосферу твору. Дослідження показало, що сучасне готичне фентезі, представлене у творі Крейг, використовує класичні готичні мотиви, такі як надприродне, смерть та ізоляція, для створення напруженої, інтригуючої атмосфери та психологічного заглиблення в переживання персонажів. Цей підхід дозволяє розглядати готичний жанр як форму літератури, що адаптується до сучасних вимог аудиторії, залишаючи незмінними свої ключові елементи.

### **Актуальність дослідження**

Актуальність цієї роботи обумовлена посиленням інтересу до сучасного готичного фентезі, яке поєднує класичні теми з новітніми культурними та соціальними контекстами, адаптуючи їх до актуальних потреб читачів. У сьогоденних умовах підвищеної соціальної нестабільності та психологічного напруження готичне фентезі стає своєрідним засобом для вивчення таких тем, як страх перед невідомим, відчуження, пошук ідентичності та внутрішній конфлікт. Це робить жанр особливо важливим у сучасній літературі, оскільки дозволяє читачам і авторам глибше дослідити питання особистих страхів і емоційних потрясінь.

### **Мета дослідження**

Ця робота має на меті дослідити і проаналізувати готичні елементи в романі *House of Salt and Sorrows* Ерін Крейг, приділяючи особливу увагу таким темам, як двоїстість реальності та фантазії, вплив надприродного і використання фольклорних мотивів.

### **Об'єкт і предмет дослідження**

Об'єктом дослідження є роман *House of Salt and Sorrows* Ерін Крейг, а предметом — ключові готичні мотиви, які слугують засобами для формування сюжету,

створення психологічного напруження та розкриття внутрішніх переживань персонажів.

### **Загальні висновки**

Дослідження показало, що роман Ерін Крейг є яскравим прикладом сучасного готичного фентезі, що вміло адаптує класичні готичні елементи до сучасних умов. Використовуючи традиційні готичні мотиви, такі як смерть і надприродне, авторка формує наратив, який розкриває глибокі психологічні переживання персонажів та відображає їхні внутрішні конфлікти. Особливої уваги заслуговує тема двоякості реальності та фантазії, яка створює атмосферу постійної напруги та невизначеності, коли герої постійно сумніваються в реальності своїх відчуттів і вчинків.

Фольклорні мотиви у романі, такі як жертвопринесення, пророцтва та символіка "зачарованих місць," додають сюжету багатошаровості та допомагають занурити читача в атмосферу міфічного світу, де потойбічні сили відіграють вирішальну роль. Ці мотиви не лише поглиблюють культурний контекст роману, але й надають значення подіям, підкреслюючи їхню фатальність і невідворотність.

Простір та атмосфера у романі також відіграють важливу роль у створенні готичної атмосфери. Острів та маєток стають не лише фізичними місцями подій, але й відображенням внутрішнього світу героїні, її страхів та внутрішньої ізоляції. Це підсилює відчуття, що герої пов'язані з простором, в якому вони живуть, і їхня доля залежить від таємничих і незбагнених сил, що контролюють цей простір.

Загалом, результати дослідження підтверджують, що роман "House of Salt and Sorrows" відображає здатність сучасного готичного фентезі адаптуватися до сучасних реалій, зберігаючи ключові елементи класичної готики. Використовуючи надприродне як засіб для дослідження психологічних та

соціальних проблем, Ерін Крейг підкреслює значення жанру як літературного інструменту, що дозволяє досліджувати теми, актуальні для сучасного читача.

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