Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglistiky a amerikanistiky

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Southern Gothic Family in the Works of Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy

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Praha, 2006

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.

I declare that the following diploma thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources mentioned.

Barbora Malířová
Květen 2006

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I.

Introduction

The literature anthologized under the label "American Southern Gothic" should be described and a thorough definition of the term should be given before an examination of one aspect of Gothicism in selected works by Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. To do so, it is necessary to separate the two components of the term and define each of them individually, i.e. we must deal first with the concepts of "Southern literature" and "Gothic art," and only then present a comprehensive definition of the joint category. According to Veronica Makowsky, in its most basic sense Southern literature is writing about the South, but this definition, as Makowsky herself admits, has many complications and thus she presents a more satisfying, theme-based definition: "Topically, Southern writing can concern the South or a Southerner's experience elsewhere, but it can also include a Southerner's writing on a non-Southern topic from a non-Southern point of view."[1] As the quotation makes clear, it is not at all easy to define the literature of the South concisely and completely. It is best to say that all Southern writers share a common nature; the fact that they were born and raised in a region so much stigmatized by its past, burdened by military and economic defeat, caused that the artists show a distinct affinity both in the choice of subject matter and a way of handling it. Of all the distinctive features of Southern letters the most relevant for our analysis are a strong historical consciousness, closely connected to an awareness of place, a strong tradition of oral story-telling, and a peculiar relationship of the individuals to their community, family and home.[2]

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[1] Makowsky, Veronica. "Walker Percy and Southern Literature." *The Walker Percy Project.* 1996. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/makowsky.html>

[2] Ulmanová, Hana. "American Southern Literature." *Lectures on American Literature.* Martin Procházka et al. Prague: Karolinum, 2002. p. 227.

These characteristics, together with the originality both in form and imagination are major features of the American South, which has occupied an exclusive place on the map of American literary canon since Edgar Allan Poe.

The definition of the Gothic is also evasive. The traditional strategies considered as constitutive of the Gothic genre from the Romantic period to the present are listed by Elisabeth Kerr in the introduction to her examination of Gothic elements of William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels:

> psychological interest and concern with the irrational and the unconscious, the
> dream side of the psyche; appalling situations; a Calvinistic Manichean polarity
> of good and evil and/or ambivalence in the moral attitudes of characters; the
> abandonment of realism as a major aim; the use of setting and atmosphere to
> create a mood and stimulate the imagination; the reader's involvement through
> sharing with the characters the terror and horror.[3]

To this list Leslie Fiedler adds other essential ingredients constitutive of the Gothic genre since *The Castle of Otranto* and relates their symbolic meanings: a girl on the run is at the center of the story and represents the flight of an uprooted man who has lost his moral home; the run invariably taking place in remote and desolate woods, which emphasize the power of darkness in the villain; of the haunted castle, the stage of most of the horrors, Fiedler claims that it is a symbol of the decaying authority, and of the fear it arouses in the souls that it is a parallel of the fear that the past could continue to work harm.[4] All these motifs have remained markers of the Gothic mode in the United States even until this day; however, many of the American authors adapted these images for American

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[3] Kerr, Elizabeth M. *William Faulkner's Gothic Domain.* New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1979. p. 6.
[4] Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel.* New York: Doubleday, 1992. p. 131-132.

reality. As a result of these continuous adaptations these elements are often barely recognizable in the post-war American gothic fiction.

The analysis of those features in the works of two writers disposing of such originality of expression as Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy is therefore an examination of the Gothic in its modern form and with symbolism suited to the social and political reality of the twentieth century. The maiden on the run is no longer an innocent virgin; the flight is at no time one from the danger of 'mere' sexual violation, and it does no longer take place in remote backwoods; the horrors are not connected solely with dilapidating ancient manors. Instead, the stressed hero-victim of a tale of terror is often a man, a young man desperately struggling to escape from the restrictions imposed upon him by the history of the whole Southern region as well as the social standing of his family. The decaying aristocratic mansion has, in the case of Flannery O'Connor, turned into a country farm, or, as in the works of Walker Percy, into a well kept historical sight in the city. The desolate woods so necessary for the functioning of horror in the past have fallen prey to one of the transformations in the treatment of violence in fiction. "The first is the *urbanization of violence*; that is to say violence is transferred from nature to society, from the given world that man must endure to the artificial world he has made."[5] The very approach towards violence has changed through time. Fiedler describes the change whose climax came in the thirties of the last century: "violence becomes not something to be fled, not the failing of otherwise admirable men, not a punishment for collective guilt- but the climax of social action."[6] Symptoms of both of these alternations are to be found

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[5] Fiedler, p.482.
[6] Fiedler, p. 484.

in the works of post-war Southern writers whose work is going to be examined in this thesis.

Although Flannery O'Connor died before Walker Percy published the greater part of his work, and although their treatments of the themes they explore in their works are substantially different, I believe that there is a thematic bond between the two artists that allows a joint investigation of what is thoroughly Gothic about them. Thus, the major aim of this thesis is first to search for the origins and fundamental principles of the Gothic, as well as the exclusively Southern Gothic features, such as the heavy burden of the past enhanced by the tension between the blacks and the whites and bizarre concept of family and community deformed by an inborn sense of the grotesque. These are going to be discussed with reference to the works of Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor. Their works will be discussed consecutively and in whole, and throughout these analyses the approaches of the two authors toward the artistic expression by means of the Southern Gothic are going to be compared and contrasted.

Major focus of the investigation will be the analysis of the abovementioned concept of Southern family, the protagonist's responsibility toward it as well as toward the community, because in the South an individual's identity is based on his or her family's standing in the community. The authors' treatment of the theme of the alienation of the self form the society is going to be explored with main emphasis on its consequences for the family relationships. The first part of the thesis (three chapters) will comprise of the introductory survey into the history of the Gothic genre in Europe, its origins in America, and the development of the genre in the South. The fourth chapter is going to deal with four short stories by Flannery O'Connor ("Everything that Rises Must

Converge," "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Good Country People," "Artificial Nigger"); their analysis will center upon the sources of anxiety of an individual in the modern Southern society, this relationship being deeply afflicted by the profoundly Gothic "haunting return of past transgressions and attendant guilt on an everyday world shrouded in strangeness."[7] The chief objective of Chapter five is to present a similar analysis concentrating upon the fiction of Walker Percy (*The Moviegoer, Love in the Ruins, Lancelot*); the author' s approach to the psychological disturbances of the protagonists will be discussed as related to the notion of social and familial framework as limitations in forming and sustaining an individual identity. The last chapter is going to attempt a comparison of the two authors' approaches toward the issue of (im)possibility of independent formation of the self in the Southern context and their usage of the Gothic devices in their treatment of this theme. The images of the Southern Gothic family in the works of the two authors will be confronted; the elaboration of the domestic character of the modern Gothic mystery and threat in O'Connor's short stories and Percy's novels will be investigated.

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[7] Botting, Fred. *Gothic.* London and New York: Routlege, 1996. p. 11.

II.

Chapter 1 - Origins and development of the Gothic

Charles Brockden Brown is traditionally labeled as the first Gothic author of the New World, and Edgar Allan Poe is frequently identified as the first Southern writer to employ the principles of the Gothic mode in his writings. But before the ruinous mansions arrived in America they had already made a journey from eighteenth-century England through Europe and what was to be perceived as a novelty in artistic expression in the United States was already an established genre in the Old World.

The origins of the genre are connected with the name of Horace Walpole, and his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, which included all basic themes and symbols constitutive of the Gothic- its story involves a flight and pursuit in a remote setting, the supernatural, and medieval trappings. But Walpole's novel does not represent the beginning of the gothic fiction, rather its vanguard, as it took more than twenty-five years before another author utilized the strategies and archetypes introduced in *Otranto*. Leslie Fiedler claims that the actual birth of the genre was conditioned by the events of the French Revolution: "the European imagination was not yet ready for it [new fashion of fiction], would not be ready until that imagination had been modified by the Revolution and the Terror."[8] Only after 1790 *The Castle of Otranto* could be revealed as the lonely forerunner of an attempt at creating a modern, truly revolutionary novel. It was Ann Radcliffe to become the first great practitioner of the Gothic novel, as well the most popular and best paid novelist of the eighteenth century England. She added suspense, painted evocative landscapes, moods or atmosphere, portrayed

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[8] Fiedler, p.126.

fascinatingly-horrifyingly evil villains, and focused on the heroine and her struggle with him. Her works appeared during the last decade of the eighteenth century– *A Sicilian Romance* in 1790, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in1794, and *The Italian* in 1797.[9] In the centre of Radcliffe's novels always stands a girl on the run from cruelty of the 'dark' hero and often imaginary ghost and horrors of castles and convents; the setting is Italy, remote and legendary; the function of her Gothic romance is portraying the power of darkness.[10] "As her writings indicate, she was of highly romantic temperament, with an intense love for all that was grand beautiful in nature, as well as a passion for the weird or mysterious." The writer was a sentimentalist as Richardson and Rousseau, and she wrote Gothic fiction in the tradition of the sentimental genre: her love for the gloomy, the weird, or the horrible is counterbalanced by her passion for romantic scenery, refinement, and elegance.[11]

The gentle feelings of a rather conventional matron such as Ann Radcliffe was, did not allow her to fully explore the possibilities of horror in the genre. It took a young man, Matthew Gregory Lewis who in 1796 wrote *The Monk* and whose depraved taste shocked his famous contemporary into writing *The Italian*. Lewis's novel follows a lust-driven monk from one abominable act to another- rape, incest, matricide, burial alive- to his gory death and well-deserved damnation. Naturally the novel was enormously successful and controversial. Its controversy was due to its problematic morality. Then, the novel had not only to please, but also to instruct, and it should instruct in the ways of virtue rather than vice. Lewis's supernatural incidents are, as opposed to those in Radcliffe's works,

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[9] Hardin, Craig, Ed. *Dějiny anglické literatury*. Praha: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1963.   pp. 117-118.
[10] Fiedler, p. 128
[11] Rose, D. Murray. "An Introduction." In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. London: George Routlege and Sons, Ltd, 1922. pp. iii-iv.

displayed in all their bloody and ghastly totality. What is threatened and usually avoided in Radcliffe is completed and handed out for the reader's disgusted delectation in Lewis. "The novel form was still young and not highly respected, and its latest development in what we now call the Gothic novel was the cause of much alarm for the more serious educationalists and moralists within the tradition of rationalism."[12] Indeed, *The Monk* and other Gothic narratives represent, much like Romantic poetry, the anti-rationalistic tendencies of art at the end of the eighteenth century.

In effect, in Lewis' work the Gothic genre gets connected with the meanings and symbols of Romantic art. He spent almost a year in Weimar, Germany, in 1792 and studied both German and the horror aesthetic of German Romantic writing, much more violent and shocking than contemporary British fiction. Lewis assimilated many features of German Romanticism, both for the plots and themes of the English Gothic. Elizabeth Kerr describes a connection between the origin and development of Gothic fiction and the history of Romanticism, in the form of its linking the medieval romance with nineteenth century Romanticism in such aspects as setting, time, themes, and character types. In the creation of the English Gothic novel the Romantic passion for medieval architecture, relics, ruins, and forests reached its climax.[13] What is implicit in Romantic poetry is externalized in the Gothic; its castles and storms act as crude symbols of the passion more subtly treated in poetry. In *The Monk* the major symbolic meanings of the Gothic, meanings closely related to the chief concerns of Romanticism are developed and elaborated. "In general, those symbols and meanings depend on an awareness of the spiritual isolation of an individual in a

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[12] McEvoy, Eva. "An Introduction." In *The Monk*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. p. vii.
[13] Kerr, p. 4.

society where all communal systems of value have collapsed or have been turned into meaningless clichés. (...) fiction projects a fear of solitude which is the price of freedom; and on the other hand, an almost hysterical attack on all institutions which might inhibit that freedom or mitigate the solitude it breeds."

Both the Gothic and Romanticism are literary genres which spring out of artists' feeling of discontent with the situation both in the condition of art as well as the status quo of the society in general. The excess of terror depicted in the Gothic fiction as well as the Romantic escape to past and nature share a common pretext: an attempt to reveal for the readers the insufficiency and defects of the contemporary world. The tragic lapses of the society, its political, cultural, religious and social anxieties, persuaded the Romantics that only extreme measures would be adequate for the extreme insecurity manifest throughout Europe. They decided to shock their audience into understanding of the evils of the present through the depiction of corruption and wickedness of the past. "Gothic thus resonates as much with anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past."[14] The Gothic thus started as an unrealistic counterpart of the rationalism of the Enlightenment: the tradition of civilized, sensible and harmonious society gets contrasted with "the lack of reason, morality and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs and works."[15] In this way the word 'Gothic' began to stand for everything that the Enlightenment feared and disdained.

The English Gothic after Monk Lewis has suffered a period of recess in popularity; few significant authors created a small number of outstanding works of Gothic imagination, the lonely exceptions being Mary Shelley, the author of

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[14] Botting, Fred. "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture." *A Companion to the Gothic.*
David Punter, ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p.3.
[15] Botting, "In Gothic Darkly." p. 3.

Frankenstein (1818) and Charles Robert Maturin, whose *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is considered one of the best of English terror novels thanks to its combination of the usual Gothic apparatus with a psychological sense of evil and power of suggestion.[16] *Frankenstein* is "a hybrid, and one to which every Gothic story that Mary Shelley is known to have read prior to 1817 made some perceptible contribution."[17] One of the most prominent influences was that of Shelley's father, William Godwin. Godwin is regarded as the founder of philosophical anarchism, is the author of a great book on political science at the time, *Political Justice* (1793), and the author of the first thriller novel which had powerful influence not only on his daughter, but also on the pioneer of Gothic fiction in America, Charles Brockden Brown. *Caleb Williams* (1794) ratifies Godwin's assertion that society must be reformed in order for individual behavior to be reformed, an emphasis that appealed to Brown's political and psychological interests.[18]

In fact the violence, fear and terror of the French Revolution induced a powerful wave of Gothic fiction as a metaphor of the political tensions. As a consequence, the revolutionary decade of 1790s produced, next to numerous tales of popular terror, also influential novels of political Gothic. The conservative Whig ideology originally connected with the Gothic genre lead to the production of romances loaded with nostalgia for old chivalric values and ideals of ancient democracy in support of the institutions of constitution monarchy and government. Quite conversely, the radicals in the 1790s, Godwin among them,

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[16] Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature.* Vol. 3. 2nd ed. London: Secker & Warburg, 1969. p. 203.
[17] Crook, Nora. "Mary Shelley, Author of *Frankenstein*." *A Companion to the Gothic.* David Punter, ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p. 58.
[18] "Godwin, William." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. 10 Mar. 2006 <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9037183>.

perceived everything Gothic as barbaric, feudal and inhumane. They saw the Gothic as a means of expressing the decayed state of the English government system.[19] In this way William Godwin, and Brockden Brown, influenced by his achievement, could employ the Gothic strategies as means of exploring the injustice and persecution in the political system as well as psychological oppression. The major importance of Godwin for the works of the political gothicists lies in his transferring the horrors and significances of the human flight from danger and the fear of specters of the past into the present and giving them a political connotation. He demonstrated that horrible pursuits did not happen only in the Middle Ages, and he also examined the effects of such persecution on the human psyche. As a product of the Godwinian school of political Gothic, *Frankenstein* is often read as a paradigm of the French Revolution, with the Creature as an emblem of the multitude, of Bonaparte, or revolutionary energy. The novel reflects the political Gothic, both in its contemporary political implications and the theme of the flight and pursuit. Godwin's influence upon the work of Charles Brockden Brown is going to be discussed in greater detail later.

The Gothic symbolism in English literature has experienced a revival only at the end of the nineteenth century, with such literary figures as Wilde, Stoker, and Stevenson. By that time, however, the Gothic had arrived in the United States of America and followed a separate line of development there.

Chapter 2 – The Birth of American Gothic

One of the most important meanings behind the Gothic symbolism is, according to Fiedler, the projection of "a sense of guilt and anxiety." This aspect

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[19] Botting, "In Gothic Darkly." pp. 88-90.

of the genre is particularly important for its adoption in the United States, since the guilt is "the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been striving to destroy." The distress which underlies the Gothic is caused by the fear "that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State, the West has opened a way for the inruption of darkness: for insanity and the disintegration of the self."[20] As America was born out of a revolution of a colony against its mother country, the feeling of anxiety over its deeds is rather substantial across the Atlantic Ocean. As a consequence, the Gothic genre became prominent early in the history of American literature.

The Gothic fiction of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Godwin was immensely popular in America, whose authors struggled to define an American literature, distinct from that of Europe, and still they looked across the ocean for models. On both sides of the Atlantic the prominent genre was Sentimental novel, epistolary and picaresque, employed chiefly in the service of moral instruction.[21] The new country proved to provide little material suitable for adaptation of the European literary forms, both historical and Sentimental, a genre dependent upon the existence of class division. Even the Gothic mode seemed at first impossible to utilize in the bright, prosperous, and optimistic atmosphere in the newly born United States, so much different from the darkness, mystery, and sense of gloominess that the ruins of Europe excited. As Allan Lloyd-Smith points out, "Without a feudal past and those relics so convenient for the European Gothicist, castles, and monasteries and legends, the American landscape seemed an unlikely

[20] Fiedler, p. 129.
[21] Seelye, John. "Charles Brockden Brown and Early American Fiction." *Columbia Literary History of the United States.* Emory Elliot, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. p. 168.

place for such fictions."[22] Relevant adaptations of the Gothic symbolism were necessary before the American tradition of the Gothic could be established. The awareness of danger looming from the frontier proved a convenient substitute for the anxiety caused by the dark, impenetrable forest of Italy; the Puritan consciousness helped establish profoundly American concepts of good and evil; the racial tensions, caused both by the presence of Native Americans and black slaves provided a surrogate class struggle, dramatized by the sense of guilt and dread inflicted by the existence of the institution of slavery.

It was Charles Brockden Brown who redefined the Gothic mode for the American reality of the end of the eighteenth century. Although he started his writing career with a combination of Sentimentalism and political radicalism in *Alcuin* (1798), and ended it as a writer of second-rate sentimental novels, his best work provided a point of departure for most American writers of the nineteenth century. To give voice to the notions of social justice and to revolutionize American life and achieve literary fame: these were the ambitions Brown strove to fulfill; the literary form which suited best these designs at the moment he began to write seemed the gothic romance as practiced by Godwin.[23] He wished to create books both morally instructive and arousing passions in the hearts of his readers. Godwin's influence can be traced in Brown's Gothic novels *Wieland* (1798) and *Arthur Mervyn* (1799). Godwin inspired Brockden Brown by the topicality of his novels, by their appeal to the political issues of freedom and government. Brockden Brown makes use of the English political Gothic and explores its significances still further with reference to the American national character. Like Godwin he introduced a different kind of darkness into the genre. As his model he

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[22] Lloyd-Smith, Allan. "Nineteenth-Century American Gothic." *A Companion to the Gothic.* David Punter, ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. p. 109.
[23] Fiedler, p. 147.

is concerned with the themes of persecution, criminality, and tyranny, but Brockden Brown's interest shifts more towards the psychopathology of motivations and delusions. In *Wieland* a mysterious voice, mistaken by its tragic hero, Theodore Wieland, for a divine call, represents Brown's critique of religious fanaticism as well as of the unreserved Rationalist belief in pure reason. The whole Wieland family is destroyed and led to madness by simultaneous influence of family history and ventriloquism of the mysterious and strange Carwin.

Young Wieland and his sister Clara attempted to rid themselves of their father's heritage- religious madness and superstition. But the arrival of young Carwin disrupts their peaceful lives, as they begin to hear strange voices. Theodore fails to disclaim his father's history, an inheritance of insanity, and in a stroke of religious trance kills his wife and child and attempts to kill his sister. All is caused by Carwin's ventriloquism, which he uses, as he claims, for reasonable ends. He is the seducer of the Sentimental fiction, using all his exceptional powers to maneuver Clara into a position convenient for the fulfillment of his scheme. Carwin leaves the scene of his horrible deeds as an unsuccessful seducer, but also his share of guilt for the tragedy of the Wieland family remains unpunished. On the contrary, the chief villain of the novel is religiously infatuated Wieland. The main aims of *Wieland* are obviously to demonstrate how madness can dwell under the surface of a reasonable world, as well as to link Carwin's successful destruction of Wieland's mental health to Federalist skepticism about the competence of citizens to govern themselves, induced by their religion and education, thus connecting his artistic ambitions with a need to reflect the political temper of his age in his works.[24] Like William Godwin's Caleb Williams, young

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[24] Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 48.

Wieland is pursued, only his pursuer is not certain, is not an external foe like the powerful Falkland. Carwin's ventriloquism haunts the young man, is omnipresent and convincing and leads to his destruction. Wieland's vulnerability to the destructive power of the voice is due to the vulnerability of the American self to the external metaphysical and physic powers. It can be manipulated, enslaved and abused.[25]

Brockden Brown's best novels- *Wieland, Arthur Mervyn, Ormond, Edgar Huntly*- ensured for him the immortal position of the founder of all demonic, macabre and apocalyptic in American letters, a tradition which has flourished throughout its history, from Brown to Edgar Allan Poe, through George Lippard, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville to William Faulkner, and from him to Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy. Leslie Fiedler is positive about the importance of Brown's achievement for American literature: "Until the Gothic had not been discovered, the serious American novel could not begin; and as long as that novel lasts, the Gothic cannot die."[26] Apart from the adaptations necessary for the adoption of the Gothic genre in the United States Brown transferred the grotesque from the external setting into the sphere of human psyche, thus preparing ground for the arrival of an expert in the quality of human guilt, fear, and psychological abnormality emerging in extreme situations, Edgar Allan Poe. John Seelye sees Brown as a writer who likes to question morality, yet without a particular solution in mind, a writer of an unprecedented kind of novel, in which questions are more important than answers, ideas more vital than lessons.[27] As the further development of national literature in America

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[25] Procházka, Martin. "Power in English and American Gothic Novel." Acta Universitatis Carolinae- Philologica 2, Prague Studies in English XXIII, 2002. p. 65.
[26] Fiedler, p. 143.
[27] Seelye, pp. 181, 185.

has shown, many of its greatest writers considered the direction set forth by Brown worth following.

As it has already been mentioned, Gothic strategies and features typical of the genre appeared in the works of virtually all writers included in the American canon after 1800, even those who are not usually included on the list of Gothicists- James Fenimore Cooper' *The* Spy (1821) and The *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *Marble Faun* (1860), Herman Melville's *Pierre* (1852) and "Benito Cereno" (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894).[28] What appealed to all these writers and many more was the possibility inherent in the genre to deal with hidden darkness of human soul, with its guilt and traumata connected with the singularities of American existence. The Gothic mode proved especially apt for the depiction of life in the American South, a region whose unique character and history connected with slavery grants enough material for literary treatment. The first man to take advantage of Brockden Brown's pioneering effort and the first man to earn the label 'Southern writer' was Edgar Allan Poe. The master of the horror story, the inventor of the detective story displayed an exceptional talent for the depiction of the mysterious, macabre and irrational.

One of the most prominent features of American Gothic since Brown is the instability of human rationality and persistence of irrationality in various forms. There is no longer the clear distinction between the light of reason and the darkness of Gothic horror typical for the Enlightenment. Absence of this divergence causes separation of reason and the subconscious, a split in the

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[28] Lloyd-Smith, pp. 116-119.

personality of the character which threatens to destroy him or her.[29] This could be observed in Brown's *Wieland*, and it is also a prominent motif in Poe. In his short stories Poe employed all ingredients of European Gothic, he even turned his back on specifically American settings and used either places and characters of uncertain nationality, or set his short-stories directly in Europe. This was necessary for him to be able to draw on purely Gothic items, such as the decaying family mansion of Usher (1839), or the catacombs in "The Cask of Amontillado," (1845) and thus evoke pure horror in the reader, which was the author's major goal.[30] Poe finished the task begun by Brown and transferred the realm of terror completely inside the human mind. Death, or fear of death and the dead, insanity and psychosis, anxiety and mental disorder come pouring from Poe's fiction like a flood and excite readers even more than one hundred and fifty years after his death.

Apart from popularizing the tale of terror and inventing the detective story Edgar Allan Poe outlined the direction for the literature of the South, established prototypes of its themes and chief concerns to be later explored by numerous outstanding artists of Southern origin. In the not too successful or critically acclaimed novel *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* (1838) (the book in fact fell into oblivion until it was re-discovered in the twentieth century and rehabilitated as an archetypal American story to be recast in *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*)[31] Poe explored the theme of the interrelationship of the blacks and the whites in the South, and as Fiedler observes, "It is, indeed, to be expected that our first eminent Southern author discover that the proper subject for American

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[29] Cf. Zdeněk Hrbata and Martin Procházka. *Romantismus a romantismy. Pojmy, proudy, kontexty.* Prague: Karolinum, 2005. p. 151.
[30] Lloyd-Smith, pp. 113-114.
[31] Fiedler, p. 393.

Gothic is the black man, from whose shadow we have not yet emerged. (...) [In *Pym*] the dark hordes of Too-Wit project the image of what the Southerner privately fears the Negro may be; just as the comic body-servant of Poe's other fiction projects the image of what the anti-abolitionist publicly claims he is."[32] It is an expression of the profoundly Southern anxiety and fears, a nightmarish projection of the tragic ordeal of human suffering, dread, and death, accentuated by the presence of the Negroes in the South and the racism they encounter every day.

Chapter 3 – The Gothic in the South

As has already been suggested, the themes typical of the Gothic had considerably altered in the hands of Southern writers. Some things, nevertheless, remained the same. Since the basic premise of the genre was an attempt to deal with traumas of the past as well as the present, it could not but fall on fertile ground in the Southern states of the New World, where "the colonists developed a vaguely medieval culture based on a mythologized glorification of feudal organization,"[33] in the states whose values were descended of the feudal tradition and which have suffered an incurable injury during the Civil War. American Southern Gothic thus represents a struggle with the collapsed past as well as its European relative, but it is charged with significance for its cultural background and history. Before Poe Southern letters could be easily divided into four basic forms: nature lyrics; the tales of the frontier settlements; historical romance; and narrations of plantation life. The two last mentioned literary forms both deal with

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[32] Fiedler, pp. 397, 399.
[33] Thompson, G.R. "Edgar Allan Poe and the Writers of the Old South." *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Emory Elliott, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. p. 263.

the issues of feudalism and slavery, however, both deal with these themes with the use of the Sentimental or satiric mode.[34] It took a Gothic author to first attempt to deal with the Southern ideas and manners by the way of exploring the damage done to its mental condition during its history. T. A. Goddu advocates that the Gothic is an essential part in the network of historical representation. She maintains that the conventional theory about the Gothic employs only psychological and theological approach to diabolic darkness, and asserts that the darkness should be placed in "slavery, a historical scene sticking like glue to and annoying the people."[35] The issue of race is indeed one of the major themes the Southern Gothic struggles to cope with, along with the past stigmatized by existence of the 'feudal' aristocracy and class system actually transferred from the Old world, a system so unfit for the democracy of America.

After Poe and Twain the Gothic tradition in the South experienced a period of temporary inhibition. The culture and economics of the Southern states had suffered a terrible blow during the Civil War. It took fifty years before the region recovered enough to produce an outstanding and original author. Literature published in the South during the postwar years were mostly novels about the 'Lost Cause' of the Civil War fight; the writers idealized the defeated South and its lost culture; African American authors were able to avoid nostalgia and pointed out the racism and exploitation of blacks in slavery. Susan Castillo, engaged in the evolution of the Southern Gothic, examines the work of George Washington Cable, a Louisiana author who sought for themes in the rich history of the state to learn that truth in the South is often far stranger than fiction. The reality of interracial sexual relationships, incurred by the varied population of New Orleans

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[34] Thompson, p. 264.
[35] Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nature.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. p. 10.

provided particularly fertile ground for the Gothic genre.[36] After the First World War a renaissance of Southern letters began with the appearance of writers such as Thomas Wolfe, John Crowe Ransom, Katherine Ann Porter, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and William Faulkner. These artists rejected the hypocrisy and sentimentalism of local color narratives and set forth to create a new exclusively Southern literary tradition.[37] The writers of the renaissance addressed three major themes in their works: the burden of history scarred by slavery, reconstruction and military defeat; racial issues; and the South's conservative culture, concentrating mainly on the issue of possibility of individual's existence without losing a sense of identity in a region where family, religion, and community were more valued than one's personal and social life.

The artist who revolutionized the literature of the South and influenced almost every writer to come after him was William Faulkner, the inventor of an original and unique mode of expression, the man who violated everything that was considered inviolable about the English sentence. He created sentences that sustain the possibility of meaning within the proliferation of words. The origin of such sentences for Faulkner lay "in a desire to say it all ...between one Cap and one period. ...to put everything into one sentence- not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second."[38] Donald Kartiganer explains not only the origin of Faulkner's method, but also the curious flow of time in the South which he wanted to capture. In order to do so he not only invented the almost never-ending,

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[36] Castillo, Susan. "Violated Boundaries: George Washington Cable's 'Belles Demoiselles Plantation' and the Creole Gothic." Litereria Pragensia. Charles L. Crow, Martin Procházka, ed. Vol. 14, No. 28 (2004). pp. 50-52.
[37] Ulmanová, pp. 226-227
[38] Kartiganer, Donald M. "Willian Faulkner." Columbia Literary History of the United States. Emory Elliott, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. p. 887.

meandering sentences, but also completely altered the concept of narration, by way of employing a series of voices, switching at odd intervals, denying existence of objective reality. It is a pure rebellion against a received tradition, splintering the classic narrative into related fragments, chronological inversions, and shifts in perspective. "Behind the language that sometimes threatens to efface the reality it pursues lies an unmistakable referent, Faulkner's northern Mississippi home and history transformed into a world capable of being mapped, genealogically tabled, chronicled from past to present," writes Kartiganer and continues to claim that basic to Faulkner is, next to a substantial sense of region and society, "the thick sense of a history already intact, preceding every event and word."[39]

William Faulkner became the gigantic figure of twentieth century Southern fiction, his greatest novels including *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1939), building on the antitheses of present and past, innovative talents and tradition, rejection and confirmation of existing institutions. Faulkner used his writing as a means of asserting his own identity, independent on the expectations of his family- an old and prominent one- as well as a means of depicting the sense of inevitable decline from the former grandeur of Southern aristocracy. The whole generation of Southern renaissance writers had to deal with an unusual situation, unprecedented in the history of the South. They stood in a place whence they could still see the tempting ideals of antebellum South, however distant and questionable, but also the attractive modernity, which tempted them to dismiss all what was in the past and virtually impossible to dismiss due to its persisting influence on present values and thought. It was Faulkner who solved the problem

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[39] Kartiganer, p. 888.

of expressing the dual perspective by combining the heritage of his family and region with the use of modernism leaned from his reading of Joyce. The theme of imprisonment in the past, the value of tradition and the issue of inheritance are treated by means of abrupt scene shifts, and winding chronology interrupted by undisciplined interior monologues. Thematically Faulkner elaborated a few topics- a deteriorating family; the encounter with the past, whose crucial factor is race; the fatality of violence and decline inherited by the characters; the uncertain blackness of a mulatto and the fear of miscegenation- these are treated with Gothic's own possession with the search for darkness in the human soul.

Faulkner is considered the sovereign of the Southern Gothic genre. His characters appear in distress, on the run from something, yet, unlike in Radcliffe, the ghost they strive to leave behind does obtain no sensible, concise explanation in the end. Faulkner's work is a profound comment on the human need to deny the passage of time and the astounding capacity of the human mind to use memory in that ultimately futile denial; an attempt to expose the elusive nature of time and memory. The past is the ghost Faulkner's greatest characters long to escape and the family estates represent for them the dark past deeds, theirs or their ancestor's; their most ruthless fear is of the past revisited, resurrected. The specific character of the past in the South has already been mentioned- the acts committed in the shadow of the slavery, past acts of racial violation, these keep coming back and haunting whole generations. Faulkner's Gothic notion of the past is expressive of the present responsibility for past acts of racial oppression; it "confirms a pattern of inevitable evil, as each generation repeats the sins of the father and founder."[40] Faulkner's treatment of classic Gothic elements is distinctly Southern: the

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[40] Kartiganer, p. 907.

grotesqueness, sense of disease, both physical and mental, death, defeat, mutilation, idiocy, sexual perversion, aberration, and lust are his chief instruments for evoking the atmosphere of universal and inevitable decline, family deterioration, and dissolution of values, traditions, and rural aristocracy in general.

In his works William Faulkner combines two of the principal traditions in American letters: the tradition of psychological horror, often close to symbolism, that begins with Charles Brockden Brown and extends through Poe, Melville, Stephen Crane, and Hemingway; and the tradition of frontier realism, beginning with Augustus Longstreet and culminating in the works of Mark Twain.[41] Faulkner treats the features of both traditions with originality emerging from the Modernist treatment of the subject matter, his experimenting with the narrative voice and time sequence. His works always reveal more than they state explicitly, be it of the characters/narrators themselves, or of their great subject- the South as Faulkner remembers it and longs to resurrect it for his readers. For example, in *The Sound and the Fury* he employs four different narrators, each presenting the story from different perspective and using a completely different style, and still the reality, the history as it really happened, is not present either in any of the chapters or in the combination of them all. The experimenting with narrative chronology and techniques for representing memory and human mind reached its peak in *As I Lay Dying*, an attempt to express the psychology of all members of the Bundren family- the story of the family's journey with the mother's body to Jefferson is related by fifteen different characters with fifteen different relations to reality. The manipulation with time is the consequence of the perpetual entwining of personal stories with history, which never ceases to affect the present.

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[41] Cowley, Malcolm. "Introduction." In *The Portable Faulkner*. Malcolm Cowley, ed. New York: The Viking Press, 1967. p. xxix.

As has already been mentioned, the Romantic Gothic underwent distinct changes in American environs; however, in Faulkner it is still evocative of a sublime and picturesque landscape and nature to which man is intensely related, it is fascinated with time and the dark persistence of past, obsessed with ruins and the demonic. The writer is employing the Modernist techniques of stream of consciousness, free manipulation with time sequence, and uncontrolled outpouring of social and historical material to explore evil in human nature and represent fears and anxieties in all humans. Moreover, Faulkner both perpetuated as well as modernized the Gothic tradition by opposing the rationality, considering it inadequate for full understanding of human experience, and introducing Freudian psychology into the Southern Gothic, thus representing the utilization of modern psychology (most obviously in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*) in work based on the unconscious since Horace Walpole transmuted his dream into *The Castle of Otranto*.[42] Another of the writer's contributions to the modernization of the genre is his combination of the basic Gothic plot line with the detective story, the narrative pattern which Edgar Allan Poe derived from the Gothic fiction (e.g. in *Sanctuary*). Leslie Fiedler summarizes Faulkner's influence upon the younger Southern Gothicists, mostly female, as follows:

> Mississippi has taken on for the imagination of the world the symbolic values attributed in the earliest years of the Gothic to Italy. Against a background of miasmic swamps and sweating black skins, the Faulknerian syndrome of disease, death, defeat, mutilation, idiocy, and lust continue to evoke in the stories of these writers a shudder once compelled only by the supernatural.[43]

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[42] Kerr, p. 54.
[43] Fiedler, p. 474.

As author after author followed Faulkner's example and whole generations of talented writers became deeply influenced by his achievement, "his vision of the South as a world of Gothic terror disguised as historical fact, ceases to be the property of a single, eccentric author and becomes a living tradition."[44] Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Elizabeth Spencer, Flannery O'Connor, and Truman Capote gradually achieved reputation and Faulknerian Gothic became the prominent genre of the South; the only one capable of capturing the feeling of dreadfulness of modern existence in the South.

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[44] Fiedler, p. 475.

III.

Chapter 4 – Flannery O'Connor: Educating by Violence

Gothic fiction after the Second World War becomes a site into which widely felt tensions arising from the state of culture can be transferred, disguised, and played out. The landscape of Gothic symbolism becomes a space into which the fears and horrors generated by the changes of modern culture can be projected.[45] Flannery O'Connor's Gothic explores this possibility entirely and fully- she wanted to expose the horrendous and the evil of Southern culture, whose cause she saw in the denial even of the possibility of their existence. She herself claimed that she wrote for all those people who have the idea that God is dead, and she used violent and shocking stories as a means of astonishing her readers into faith only because they could not be reached by any other means.[46] Only artists are able to see what is really grotesque, perverse and unacceptable about modern existence. The problem is to present these deformations to the audience that has learned to see them as natural. The writer is thus forced to use more and more violent and shocking means to move the audience to revelation, to make them see things as the artist sees them.[47] The methods of depicting terror, fear and violence typical of the Gothic thus appear in O'Connor's short fiction and novels as adequate means of expressing her vision of the world.

As it will become manifest in the analyses of O'Connor's and Percy's work, the old themes of Southern literature (dynastic decline and fall, rural versus urban values, the still palpable heritage of Civil war and Reconstruction) were

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[45] Hogle, Jerrold E. "The Gothic Ghost of the Counterfeit." *A Companion to the Gothic.* David Punter, ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. pp. 296-297.

[46] "Flannery O'Connor." *The Cambridge History of American Literature.* Vol.7. Ch.3. Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p. 350.

[47] Zelenka, Jan. „Přísná moralistka Flannery O'Connorová." *Od Poea k Postmodernismu.* Martin Hilský; Jan Zelenka, ed. Praha: Odeon, 1993 p. 261.

significantly modified in the works of art of the generation of William Styron, Flannery O'Connor, Truman Capote and Walker Percy. At the same time issues as the clash between community identity and individual sensibility, the secularization of modern society and the erosion of religious orthodoxy, the historical sense and community expectation were not by any means obsolete, and in fact remained prominent in O'Connor's and Percy's writing.

In the South the individual's relationship to his or her community is linked to the burden of the past; their identity and honor is based on their family's standing in the community, which is determined by its participation upon the burdening of the region's past. After the Second World War the young talented writers (Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy among them) found the topic of individual's struggle to rid himself or herself of family history, and the theme of the inescapability of one's heritage especially compelling. Theirs was the generation after the Southern Renaissance, the generation without a direct connection with the slave past of their homeland. They felt an urge to express the frustration of young people caused by their vain desire to live their lives without any reference to the past, free of their ancestors' guilt. Yet the analysis of Percy's and O'Connor's work is going to prove that this escape is virtually impossible in the reality of the Southern attachment to the past, land, and traditional ideals, still so much earnest even in the second half of the twentieth century.

Flannery O'Connor is, above all, a moralist. Among the labels used to describe her literary achievement- Southern, Gothic, Catholic- the moralist character is the most prominent in her short stories. She understood well what Allen Tate in his "The Profession of Letters in the South" called the conflict between modernism and fundamentalism, i.e. chiefly the impact of the new

middle-class civilization upon the rural society. She became a defender of the older (religious) community- and employed what Tate suggested as the key to unlock the Southern mind- the bloody and perilous reverses that permit people to imagine what they might have been and thus to discover what they are.[48] Her morality is thus not only Catholic, but also rural, anti-urban and skeptical towards the fashionable so-called progress spreading from the North and superseding traditional Southern ideals. According to *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, though she "never sentimentalized the vocation of the subsistence farmer and did not have romantic ideas about traditionalism generally," she subjected those of her characters who represented the modern, secular, faithless reality to satire, and forced them to deal with extreme situations of terror and fear.[49]

As in Faulkner, O'Connor' emotions and sympathies give life to memorable characters, both the diabolical and the ones who become symbols of the Old South, "of war and reconstruction, of commerce and machinery destroying the standards of the past."[50] She is never simply nostalgic about the glory of the past; her position toward its sins is rather indulgent, but never naïve. She concentrates upon portraying the shortcomings and weaknesses of people, both from the country and the city; all immorality is subjected to a harsh critique in her work. O'Connor likes to employ pairs of characters in order to illustrate the ill morals of the world, and it is symptomatic that a young woman or man, eager to leave all past behind, and a parent, grand parent or custodian, nostalgic for the past glory of the South, most often form the pair. Julian and his mother in

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[48] Tate, Allen. "The Profession of Letters in the South." in *The Literary South*. Luis D. Rubin, Jr. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973. p. 468.
[49] *The Cambridge History of American Literature.* p. 347.
[50] Cowley, p.viii.

"Everything That Rises Must Converge;" Hulga and her mother in "Good Country People;" Mr. Head and his grandson Nelson in "The Artificial Nigger;" the grandmother and the Misfit in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find;" these are only few of the pairs which illustrate the clash of two cultures, of the past and the present. This strategy gives the author the power to describe her heroes through the eyes of his or her counterpart, and thus to avoid critical judgment from the narrator's side which would deprive the reader of the effect of surprise at the moment of greatest emotional impact, which is to come as a shocking climax of each of the short stories.

One of the worse shocks that O'Connor prepared for her heroes is that which awaits Julian at the end of his bus journey in "Everything That Rises Must Converge." Julian's malady is the same as that of other young people in her short fiction- arrogance, selfishness, rudeness, lack of gratitude and respect. As Jan Zelenka points out, it seems that their education rid them of their humanity and basic morality.[51] They are proud, self-confident and feel superior to those who do not share their infinite trust in rationality, reason, material values and so-called progress. Julian does not like his own mother, for him she is an embarrassment, a burden, a backward; he considers himself better than her, feels contempt for her occupation with the past. His frustration and disregard for his mother is even vaguely aggressive: "There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit."[52] The sudden death of his mother is the blow that is supposed to take the blinds off his eyes and show him his own life the way it is- he is fully dependent upon his mother and there is no promise of change in the future.

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[51] „Přísná moralistka Flannery O'Connorová." p. 267.
[52] O'Connor, Flannery. "Everything That Rises Must Converge." *The Complete Stories.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. p. 409.

The old woman is Julian's counterpart. Their difference is exemplified by their conversation at the bus stop: "He thrust his face toward her and hissed, 'True culture is in the mind, the *mind*,' he said, and tapped his head, 'the mind.' 'It's in the heart,' she said, 'and in how you do things and how you do things is because of who you *are*.'"[53] She is the Belle, the relic of the old glorious times of the South, the lady in reduced circumstances who insists upon being what her ancestors used to be long time ago. As Elizabeth Kerr points out, "O'Connor's South is haunted by living ghosts, who dwell in a past more real to them than the present and who have rejected the modern world which offers them no gratifications commensurate with those of the myth of the past."[54] For them the changes, which accompany the progress, mean the arrival of the chaos: "The world is a mess everywhere... I don't know how we've let it get in this fix," says Julian's mother only a little while after she has boasted: "I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am."[55] The course of the events proves her a liar, most probably a liar to herself. She knew who she was a long time ago, yet new situations, like the integration of the buses, leave her at a loss. According to Kerr, the cult of the past in the South as symbolized in its ruins owes less to cultural climate and imagination than to remembered history,[56] thanks to people like Julian's mother; people whose present is the past for others: "She lived according to the laws of her own fantasy world, outside of which [Julian] had never seen her set foot."[57]

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[53] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 409-10.
[54] Kerr, p.27.
[55] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 410, 407.
[56] Kerr, p. 27.
[57] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 411.

The couple is one of the variations on the theme of a widowed mother who has emasculated her son,[58] a parallel to the past which keeps constraining the life of the new generation. Julian did not like to consider all she did for him, everything that gave her pleasure was small and depressed him, yet she is the woman who had struggled fiercely to feed and clothe and put him through school and who was supporting him still, until he got on his feet. "'Some day I'll start making money,' Julian said gloomily- he knew he never would." Among the two the mother is the strong one, the one standing on her own feet, the one who has no authority but all the power over his life, no matter how hard the boy tries to deny or disregard the fact. The mother- the past and all that it represents- is the cause of Julian's problem: he desperately longs to define himself without any reference to his family slaveholding past; his mother does everything, however unintentionally, to make sure he does not succeed. He knows well that "knowing who you are is good for one generation only. You haven't the foggiest idea where you stand now or who you are," and she still urges him to build his identity upon the same history that had been formative for her: "Your great-grandfather was a former governor if this state, your grandfather was a prosperous landowner. Your grandmother was a Godhigh."[59] This the son and the mother have in common: they are the descendants of the old ruling caste who have the wish but not the courage make a stand to the reality and resist the South and its corruption. They dwell so much on the past that they are incapable of facing the present (like Faulkner's Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, or Reverend Hightower in *Light in August*); or they retire into the illusion of being inviolable Southern ladies (like Quentin's mother, who says: "We Bascombs need nobody's

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[58] Pritchett, V.S. *The Tale Bearers*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1980. p. 167.
[59] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." pp. 405-406.

charity."[60]). Both of them fall prey to the circumstances, they are doomed by their incapability to conform to the South as it is today, just as Faulkner's characters did before. In fact, both authors, Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner share this history with their protagonists; they both try to cope with the reality of their families' continuous decline and fall in social standing since the days of their grandparents.

Symbolically, the mother is the past and her son attempts to live without her, to rise in revolt and do something to shock her, but finds him self incapable of any sensible and effective action. His protests are as feeble and insincere as his attitude towards the blacks. He surely does not agree with her saying that they were better off when they were slaves, but at the same time "he never spoke about [his family's mansion] without contempt or thought of it without longing."[61] He is the one sensitive to their descent on the social ladder. He lives his life connected with the family history and its ideals. He makes a point of sitting next to a Negro on a bus, "in reparation as it were for his mother's sins,"[62] but he does not quite see the blacks as human beings either; his attitude towards them is all about making points, about teaching his mother a lesson. None of the two is fee of prejudice or able to face facts. The old woman's death at the end is a moment of revelation for both of them; she is shocked into the realization of the fact that the world has changed since she last took a look at it; he is initiated "into the world of guilt and sorrow."[63] Finally Julian realizes that his inability to live his life his way is not connected only with his mother. After her death he isn't emancipated as he

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[60] Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury.* New York: Vintage Books, 1987. p. 252.
[61] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 408.
[62] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 409.
[63] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 420.

secretly hoped he would be; he realizes his connection to the South, the guilt and sorrow shared by all Southerners.

This is what connects Flannery O'Connor to the tradition of American Gothic established by Brockden Brown under the influence of Godwinian political Gothic- Julian's psychological motivations and illusions are examined with reference to the social context and its implications for his mental life. Central to "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is the dubious existence of personal freedom for individuals who (like Julian) live their life haunted by the familial or communal past. Young Weiland's life ended under the effect of his father's death by self-combustion in religious trance, the son being susceptible to manipulation into religious belief. So Julian is prone to sentiment and nostalgia for the same past he tries to disregard, the past his mother refuses to recognize dead, in this way being the victim of his upbringing and the family's past.

O'Connor is the master of building of the mood and feeling of vague threat by such means as hints and suggestions aiming at the events that are to happen later: "Her doctor had told Julian's mother that she must lose twenty pounds on account of her blood pressure, so on Wednesday nights Julian had to take her downtown on the bus for a reducing class at the Y."[64] This first sentence of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" proves Flannery O'Connor's ability to provide the reader with a concise exposition within a single sentence. Only the second reading reveals the writer's genius for compressed, brief and precise style. When starting to read the story for the second time the reader already knows that high blood pressure is most probably the cause of the mother's death, and that Julian had to take her by bus because of the integration of the buses which made

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[64] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 405.

her feel uncomfortable and which later had tragic consequences for the family. O'Connor's descriptions of her heroes' environment are also very concise, brief and vivid, and they do not lack the Gothic quality typical for the South: "The sky was a dying violet and the houses stood out darkly against it, bulbous liver-colored monstrosities of a uniform ugliness though no two were alike."[65] The example illustrates the author's ability to suggest the threat and anticipate future violence, as well as describe the hideousness and menace of the urban landscape through depiction of the Southern sky.

In contrast to O'Connor's usage of environment for the purpose of building and enhancing the mood of her characters, in the works of most American Gothicists so far (Brockden Brown, Hawthorne, Poe, Faulkner) appears the symbolism of the setting typical for the Romantic Gothic. While the female artist avoids any detailed description of the protagonists' milieu and refuses to relate the sense of conflict between the characters through the outside condition of their home, William Faulkner fully avails himself of the Gothic symbolism of the ruinous mansion as a home of a deteriorated family (e.g. the Frenchman's Bend, Sutpen's Hundred, and the Compson Domain). The place where her heroes live plays an important role in their life, in most cases the role of a prison they are unable to break out of. In case of both Julian and Hulga of "Good Country People" it is a self-imposed prison where they are hiding from reality, from the possible hurt, from life itself (here the influence of Faulkner is obvious, Mrs. Compson and Joanna Burden also choose to live in self-imposed prisons). Due to the protective function of her protagonists' houses, they need to leave their home first before they encounter their fate: Julian takes his mother to town by bus,

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[65] "Everything That Rises Must Converge." p. 406.

Bailey and his family take a trip to Florida, Mr. Nelson takes his grandson to Atlanta, even Joy/Hulga leaves the house, though she goes only to the barn.

The most violent of O'Connor's stories, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," begins with a brief sentence loaded with hidden meanings: "The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida."[66] Its full relevancy is only slowly disclosed to the readers during the story: that the lady is old-fashioned, that her word is of little weight in the family and, most importantly, that if her son agreed to go to east Tennessee according to her wish the tragedy would not have happened. In the opening O'Connor leaves it up to the reader to detect and diagnose the malady of each of the members of the family and then she resolves the primary situation by an extreme solution- by the murder of the family by a man called The Misfit, whose malady is of similar kind.

The world as O'Connor depicts it in this short story is inhabited by people who lost track of God and the true South, people who seem unable to love, believe and communicate with each other even on the most basic level. This is the world of the grandmother, her pragmatic son Bailey, tiresome grandchildren John Wesley and June Star and their quiet mother. If we want to see the fate of the only complete family in O'Connor's work as punishment for their 'crimes,' we easily recognize them: Bailey is the son of an old Southern lady, of a true nostalgic Belle, but he is a modern, rational man who takes his family for vacation in Florida, exactly according to the dictate of fashion. He is a boring man, he doesn't have "a naturally sunny disposition"[67] like his old-fashioned mother and trips make him nervous. He has learned to ignore his mother's advice and complaints; in fact he does not talk to her at all- he barely speaks to anybody. Like Julian,

[66] O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." *The Complete Stories.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. p. 117.
[67] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 121.

Bailey sins by not respecting his own mother, by his feeble attempt to shake off all that his mother represents, simply by disregarding her existence as much as possible. The sin of his children is the same, their lack of interest in anything that their grandmother loves ("Let's go through Georgia fast so we won't have to look at it much."[68]), their atheism, nihilism and love for comic books; and their mother seems too languid to find interest in anything at all. "Like so many O'Connor denizens," writes Weinstein, "the Georgia family lives a shrunken, utterly materialist life, an unending series of daily escapes from the fullness of memory and history."[69]

The grandmother's sin is her pride and foolish nostalgia for things that have never existed; otherwise she is just a nice old lady who prefers the imagined past to the present. She is the twin sister of Julian's mother, with the same tragic end. The little girl sees through her quite clearly: "'She wouldn't stay at home for a million bucks,' June Star said. 'Afraid she'd miss something. She has to go everywhere we go.'"[70] O'Connor consciously makes the old woman the only lovable member of the family. She is in sharp contrast to her daughter-in-law in slacks and a kerchief on her head, a real lady in her dotted navy blue dress and violets on her hat: "her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady."[71] (O'Connor diabolically anticipating again: the accident really happens!) Just like in so many other O'Connor stories the grandmother, the only character towards whom the writer shows at least a little

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[68] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 119.
[69] Weinstein, Arnold. *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo.* Oxford: Oxfordd University Press. 1993. p. 118.
[70] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 118.
[71] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 118.

sympathy, is going to take the hardest fall. All the old woman did from the beginning of the story she did only with the best of intentions. However, the woman, who appears to be almost a saint at the beginning ends up the main cause of the death of the whole family: were it not for the grandmother telling the story of the secret panel they would have driven straight to Florida, had she not taken the cat into the car the accident would have happened. The grandmother has to be stripped of her illusions of reality and social pretensions, and that can happen only during a fatal meeting with The Misfit.

In the person of The Misfit the author employs one of the features of Gothic literature- "exploring the psychology of evil in human nature and appealing to the need for mythic representation of fears and anxieties in all human beings."[72] "The murderer calls himself 'The Misfit' because he cannot make his sense of what he has done fit with his sense of the far worse things God has done to him... he kills out of his despairing sense of being in a spiritual crux."[73] The villain is a true nihilist, a man who has lost all traces of belief, a man so much disappointed by God that he decided to spend the rest of his life denying his existence, as a punisher of everybody he meets with the sole purpose of evening the score with the society: "Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all?"[74] He feels that he has sentenced the grandmother and her family to a fit punishment for whatever their crimes are by shooting them. This act is the affirmation of his life as a true 'misfit,' a person who has rejected all humanity and religion as superfluous. Yet, typically for O'Connor, his act is viewed as a positive one- he has performed a change upon

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[72] MacAndrew, Elizabeth. "The Gothic and Popular Literature." Quoted in Kerr, Elizabeth M. *William Faulkner's Gothic Domain.* New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1979. p.5.
[73] *The Cambridge History of American Literature.* p. 350.
[74] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 131.

the family. "O'Connor alters the scene, makes it erupt with violence and cataclysm, actualizes her metaphors, takes her people into the woods, and operates her magic on them there, in order to reconceive the human family and to display our terrible fit within it."[75]

Bailey's family is the battlefield between the Old South and the New South, with the grandmother on the one side, and the rest of the family on the other. The family is complete, with parents, three children and a grandmother, still the main battle is taking place between the father and his mother- an incongruous couple, a widowed mother with a weak offspring, who both require the purification by violence and destruction. Bailey's fate is irreversible: his lack of any passion whatsoever, his passivity and unconcern in anything his mother cares for determine his and his family's quick, almost incidental death. It is the murder of the old woman by the hand of The Misfit that is the climax of the short story. And O'Connor makes it a family confrontation of a different kind: "His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake has bitten him and shot her three times through the chest."[76] It is little probable that the grandmother is just confused and makes a mistake, as we are told that her mind is clear at that instant. The secret of the connection between them ultimately becomes irrelevant, because at the moment she calls the murderer her son she creates a family bond between them. The lady might just been trying to appeal to The Misfit's humanity, and he immediately decides to show her that he possesses

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[75] Weinstein, p. 119.
[76] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 132.

none. Their confrontation is again the one of the symbolic graceful and idyllic South and the modern and ferocious present South. It is necessary to eliminate the fixation upon the past, all the illusions of its harmony and tranquility, to punish her for all the crimes she even is not aware of - the only way to do it is killing her, in this way the past is killed by what she has called her own offspring- by the betrayed, selfish, and blasphemous present.

In the Gothic genre the character of a tyrannical father or foster parent has its established place since *The Castle of Otranto*. Tyrannical fathers enjoy the dominance of strong will over their children, serve as the embodiment of terror, cruelty and fatality; in fact, the father is often a true gothic character: dark and cruel, enjoying exercising his powers over others. Such figures appear also in American Gothic: Carwin's custodian Ludlow in Charles Brockden Brown's *Carwin the Biloqvist*, Joanna Burden's father Calvin in William Faulkner's *Light in August*. However, in Flannery O'Connor's stories the authoritative male figure is replaced by the figure of a dominant, overprotective mother, whose loving care and gentle upbringing emasculate her offspring, causing him or her traumata similar to those inflicted by the conventional tyrannical father. Julian and Bailey had suffered from their own weakness, their life had been restricted and depreciated by the influence of the past imposed on them by the parent; and the author sees the only way out through the death of the affectionate tyrant, or, in case of Bailey's mother, the death of the child.

The theme of the individual's strife with determination and expectations of the single parent is prominent in another of the most famous of O'Connor's short stories, "Good Country People," though the conflict between the mother and the daughter is not central to the story, it serves more as a basis for the clash between

Joy and her misplaced view of the 'simple' farm people. Joy Hopewell had left her home on a farm for the city as soon as she was twenty-one. She had also changed her Christian name to Hulga, the ugliest name she could think of, and thus she had attempted to break all her bonds with the country. Yet the sincerity of this act is disputable, as her major motivation seems to be rebellion against her mother's attachment to the country life and her disgust over her own helplessness: "One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga." Nevertheless she is uncomfortable when she hears Mrs. Freeman use her chosen name, and considers her name a personal affair.[77] Her education and upbringing made Joy feel superior to 'simple' country people and skeptical towards their values and religion. Their shared erroneous view of the people around the mother and daughter is verbalized in the phrase 'good country people'. With the somehow condescending use of this phrase the mother and daughter are equally mistaken. They share the same blunder in their judgment of the people in the country, though each for different reason: old Mrs. Hopewell is the aristocrat of the South, the dignified lady of the plantation and the principle of *noblesse oblige* is still deep inside her mind. "All this was very trying on Mrs. Hopewell but she was a woman of great patience. She realized that nothing is prefect and that in the Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them."[78] Hulga, on the other hand, feels superior on the intellectual level, because she believes that the education that made her rid herself of 'useless' religion made her see things others cannot see, although the fact it is quite the contrary.

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[77] O'Connor, Flannery. "Good Country People." *The Complete Stories.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. p. 275.
[78] "Good Country People." p. 273.

Joy/Hulga is another one of O'Connor's modern young people, who rejected their Southern grain and would be most happy to abandon the South itself, or at least to transform and modernize it, but they are not able to do so because of a dependence of some kind (Julian's financial dependence on his mother, Joy/Hulga's physical handicap that forced her to return to her mother's care). They are in fact deeply unhappy individuals whose inability to break all the bonds to the Old South causes them frustration. Their tragedy lies in the fact that they usually cannot see the true cause of this unhappiness and this forces them to strive even harder in the wrong direction. For them, there is only one possibility of salvation, which is granted to them by their author in the form of a violent shock that they will never forget, as it opens their eyes to all truths about their life.

Joy/Hulga's missing leg is the reason and at the same time a suitable metaphor for her skepticism and spiritual insufficiency, it is a condition for the lesson taught to her by one of the 'good country people.' Hulga desires to teach a lesson to Manley Pointer, a young man whom she supposes to be dedicated to the service to God, and bound by the narrowness of his world-view and lack of city education. When looking at the young man, Hulga sees a poor boy that should be initiated into her world- the world of atheism and sexual freedom based on the destruction of his inner boundaries of conventions. Her designs for the rendezvous with the boy are to be shattered to pieces: "She imagined, that things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life."[79] She is destined to realize too late her mistake in building

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[79] "Good Country People." p. 284.

her plans on the false foundations of silly stereotype and prejudice. Manley is not inferior to Hulga; in fact he is a less violent variant of the Misfit, as he also provides an older woman with a moment of revelation. At the end of the story, it is Hulga/Joy who is revealed as naive and mistaken: "Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. 'Aren't you,' she murmured, 'aren't you just good country people?'"[80] The incident reveals her as fooling herself- she claims she does not believe in God, and yet the feeling that there is something to believe in has made her feel safe; the boy's real nihilism, absolute belief in nothing frighten her. Although she has scorned them, the existence of the simple, good country people was reassuring of the existence of the certainties of the old familiar world. Mr. Pointer, having stolen her wooden leg as a trophy, initiates Hulga into a dismal world full of vicious people, a world in which faith remains one of the few things to hold on to.

It is symptomatic that the central character of "Good Country People" has two names. Joy earnestly longs to acquire a new identity as Hulga, a philosopher and atheist. While this seemed plausible enough during her studies in the North, it proves impossible in her mother's household. Mrs. Hopewell refuses to acquiesce in her daughter's wish to develop an identity different from that defined for her by inheritance and upbringing. As a result, the young woman's existence is split into two contradictory identities, which are presented in the views of the mother and the daughter. During the story it becomes obvious that for Mrs. Hopewell her daughter will always be Joy; Joy longs to become Hulga, but in the moment of distress is exposed as unable to complete the transformation.

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[80] "Good Country People." p. 290.

As the story shows, O'Connor's attachment to the ancient values of the country is not based on unreserved admiration or naïve nostalgia. Manley Pointer and Mrs. Freeman share certain vices typical for rural regions, like considerable degree of hypocrisy and fascination with the deformed, crippled and morbid, these being motivations for Mrs. Freeman's calling Joy Hulga and for the boy's collection of trophies. As in "A good Man Is Hard to Find" O'Connor treats both sides- the 'Modern young people' who struggle to shake of their heritage and the representatives of the Southern countryside- with equal criticism. She looks at the ailments of the country with the same reproach she has for he Hulgas and Julians. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin Compson tells his college friend Shreve McCannon: "I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died." And Shreve's response to the violent and passionate story he hears is full of his nonperception of the power of the region's singularity and its influence on its people: "The South, the South, Jesus."[81] Quentin, like O'Connor's young heroes is overwhelmed with the presence of the local character inside him, the memories of his family's past, secrets and tragedies which he longs to leave behind but he cannot;   they keep coming and tormenting him so much that he, unable to start a new life, ends his life by suicide. O'Connor wakes her protagonists, aged similarly to Quentin, to the new life only by taking from them what they have been hiding behind from it: Julian is deprived of his mother; Bailey looses everything including life; Joy/Hulga's artificial leg is stolen; Mr. Nelson's dignity becomes meaningless and vain.

"The Artificial Nigger" is another story about how it takes a shock to really learn something about human nature, though the theme and the nature of the

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[81] Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* Quoted in Cowley, p. xviii.

climax are slightly different. Mr. Nelson and his grandson Nelson, the two main protagonists, are standing at the train stop at the beginning of a day that is going to test and change their relationship for ever. O'Connor again employs the technique of connecting the weather and sky with the atmosphere of the characters' lives; the fact that they begin their journey at the very beginning of a new day is significant of the changes in both their lives, and O'Connor shows her sense of irony in situating the couple with their back to the rising sun: "A coarse-looking orange-colored sun coming up behind the east range of mountains was making the sky a dull red behind them, but in front of them it was still gray and they faced a gray transparent moon, hardly stronger than a thumbprint and completely without light."[82] In correspondence with the morning sky what lies in front of the two men is gray and dark, and only later during the day their future is brightened by the test they undergo. In the evening their path forward is illuminated not only by the clouds but also by the revelation provided to them both at the same moment by the plaster statue of a Negro. When getting off the train in the evening the boy and the old man are not the same as when they got on in the dawn.

In a crucial moment of the day Mr. Head makes the greatest mistake in his life and the worst thing he has ever done. He denies his own blood, the only member of his family left to him, his beloved grandson Nelson. All day the old man has been under extreme pressure. The night before the journey he had decided to teach the child a moral lesson. He intended to show him the ugliness and ill morale of the city and its way of life. He intended to be a reliable, self-confident guide of the innocent boy and his scheme was marred by a series of

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[82] O'Connor, Flannery. "The Artificial Nigger." *The Complete Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976. p. 252.

unlucky accidents- by the forgotten snack, by the heat, by the boy's curiosity; getting lost in the black neighborhood was extremely stressing for the old-fashioned man, a relative to Julian's mother. Under such conditions the rationality of an individual is suppressed by his instincts or even a state of temporal madness. At this moment Mr. Head claims he has never seen Nelson before, denies him and thus disgraces himself irreversibly.

Mr. Head intended to teach Nelson a lesson about depravity of the town and about Negroes- people so different that they might not be human at all. The old man succeeds: "I only said I was born here and I never had nothing to do with that. I want to go home. I never wanted to come in the first place," says the ten-year-old Nelson, tired of the city. But the old man achieves his goal only by destroying all the child's illusions about his grandfather. This moment is the tragedy of their relationship, and Mr. Head knows well it will be impossible to delete the day from their memories and continue their lives like before: " He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and man would be like without salvation."[83]

O'Connor's depiction of a Southern close-minded person goes into the extreme depths of what constitutes as well as produces an imprudent old-timer. Mr. Head takes pride in his "calm understanding of life"[84] and wisdom, he accepted the role of a guide for the child, yet his childish insistence on his own dignity causes his disgrace. As has already been suggested, pride is the crime that the writer punishes most severely, regardless on which side of the barricade it occurs. The old man is to discover his fallibility and to realize that he had sinned, though he has never been aware of his sins. Young Nelson is punished for his

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[83] "The Artificial Nigger." pp. 263, 268.
[84] "The Artificial Nigger." p. 249.

pride of being born in the city- he learned not to love the city people and their 'progress;' he learned to love the things he knows best, just like his grandfather. The day of their journey is to remain in their minds forever and it is not going to be a happy memory. The moment of revelation for both of them, for their relationship and their lives that have been shaken is the 'encounter' with a plaster statue of a Negro in a place where "they ain't got enough real ones."[85] At the end of the eventful day both the boy and the old man are happy to see something to what they can easily define their relationship. An artificial nigger is just a thing, the only solid thing in their journey; a sight of the simple object has the power to unite them; at the moment their identical reactions blend their personal identities, whose similarities have been touched upon at the very beginning of the story: "They were grandfather and grandson but they looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, while the boy's look was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget it."[86] This doubling of her heroes' identities may have been inspired by the early work of a contemporary author who also worked with the idea of alter egos- Truman Capote. Like O'Connor, Capote writes about people who are spiritually alone and without love, and whose isolation forces them to join their life with often grotesque creatures, who become their finally discovered primary selves, their destiny.[87] Each becomes what Fred Botting calls "the new form of the Gothic ghost, the double or shadow" of the other. "An uncanny figure of horror, the double presents a limit that cannot be overcome, the

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[85] "The Artificial Nigger." p. 269.
[86] "The Artificial Nigger." p. 251.
[87] "McCullers and Capote: Basic Patterns." *The Creative Present.* Nona Balakian, Charles Simmons, ed. New York: Doubleday, 1969. pp. 95-96.

representation of an internal and irreparable division in the individual psyche."[88] The doubling of the Heads happens in the moment of great emotional distress; under the circumstances of the disastrous journey through modern Atlanta neither of them is able to sustain a sense of individual identity. In this situation all sources of anxiety in the society (the presence of the blacks and guilt of the past, the conflict between country morality and city chaos, the generation gap between the old and the young concept of virtue and role) combine to cause horror in the protagonists and confuse their identities.

An important feature of European, Radcliffean "White" Gothic is a happy ending- the beauty is saved and all troubles reconciled. O'Connor's Southern ladies cannot be saved from their fate, in fact almost none of her heroes can be 'saved in the last moment,' and that is due to the innovation and originality with which O'Connor approached the Gothic concept of flight, and the myth of a lady in distress itself. As is shown by the analysis of the chosen short stories, the author created a range of characters who share one thing- they are running away from something; they are in fact all 'in distress.' Some of them are running from the present, trying to recapture the past they seem unable to live without; some are running away from the Southern, country heritage, some of them are trying to escape God. They are all desperate in their flight although their pursuers do not threaten them physically. At the end of each story O'Connor makes them meet their rescuers- and not exactly knightly gentlemen. In order to help her characters out of the troubles O'Connor is willing to do anything, even annihilate them. Joy, The Misfit, his victims, Julian, his mother, Mr. Nelson, and his grandson are saved from their flight by the tragedies and shocks they are forced to face, i.e.

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[88] Botting, *Gothic.* p. 93.

Hulga was an unhappy human being trying to rid herself of her Southernness and her religion when her rescuer, Manley Pointer came and saved her through his cruel behavior. Julian and his mother were both also typical Gothic heroes, although trying to escape in opposite direction, when they met a huge Negress who saved them both. This is the essence of O'Connor's 'shock therapy' and the originality in the treatment of the Gothic myths.

Flannery O'Connor indeed aims at the current state of the Southern region of the United States, but, as already mentioned, her concern is its moral state rather than its social issues. Her characters are all imprisoned in the past, either worshipping the value of tradition or seeking to contradict the inheritance. Her families are deteriorated into defective torsos, formed by members unable to communicate, unwilling to or incapable of understanding each other. The fatal encounters with violence have two possible effects: their understanding of their own lapses and reform of the state of affairs, or death in case they refuse to open their eyes. Both the protagonists and the audience are supposed to realize what O'Connor sees absolutely clearly- the "alienating, secular and capitalist modernity"[89] which destroys the original nature of the American South. In the words of Red Sammy: "A good man is hard to find; everything is getting terrible."[90] He and the grandmother then discuss better times, criticize the way things are now and nostalgically remember the past, of which they are convinced that it was much better, friendlier and safer. Nonetheless, "like all Gothic writers, Flannery O'Connor has a deep sense of the Devil or rather of the multiplicity of devils, though not in any conventional sense."[91] There is wrong on both sides; none of them is just in their contempt for the other. O'Connor seems to propose an

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[89] "Flannery O'Connor." p. 347.
[90] "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." p. 122.
[91] Pritchett, p. 168.

infeasible scheme in which people would live in the present, draw their strength from the good and bad in the past, yet they would not be suffocated by the past, they would look into the future with the benefit of hindsight. That is why she exposes to shock both the young as well the old, she does not have a special sympathy for anybody, she sees immorality and imprudence on both sides.

The effect of her writing is based on O'Connor's unique talent of brief and accurate description as well as her love for satire that she cultivated and perfected in her youth when she submitted cartoons to the *New Yorker*. The ability to recognize and name the 'illnesses' of both the society and individuals is enough to make a good satirist, but were it not for O'Connor's decision to cure them by shock therapy, she could not be ranked among the best post-war Gothic writers. She herself claimed that she was fascinated by the moments in which her characters are confronted with the Absolute.[92] All characters of O'Connor's stories are exposed: "they are plain human beings in whose fractured lives the writer has discovered an uncouth relationship with the lasting myths and the violent passions of human life."[93] The purpose of horror and violence in her work is not entertainment, nor does she content herself with the surreal effect of her descriptions on the reader. The writer depicts ordinary characters in extreme situations which force them to radically re-evaluate their lives or which change their lives for themselves. O'Connor's heroes are in fact antiheroes who live in a lie; they lie to themselves and consequently they lie to people around them and O'Connor is convinced that the only way to open their eyes and expose all hidden passions to her audience is through tragedy and intense personal dramas. In her approach towards the conflicts between people and their exposure O'Connor

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[92] "Flannery O'Connor." p. 349.
[93] Pritchett, p. 164.

refers to the basic outline established by the major authors of the Romantic Gothic:

> Not conflict... but the exposure of conflict is the romantic's intention... For mystery is the sign of tensions unresolved that leave behind them an unanswered question. And abnormality is a sign that the conflict is still undecided, the resolution beyond guessing at, and wonderment more potent than satisfaction. Essentially the nightmare is created by the revelation of the blackness in the depths of human nature. In fiction the evil is usually either defeated by goodness or it survives.[94]

In O'Connor's short stories the evil is defeated by a different evil, and that imparts them with horrifying effect and impact. In this way Flannery O'Connor succeeds in adapting the Gothic features and the effect of catharsis to the current social and cultural situation.

The concept of evil and innocence in man as introduced in the original European Gothicists and disposed of by early American Gothic authors, such as Charles Brockden Brown is thus developed into a more complex notion of an antihero. Walpole's Manfred, Radcliffe's Schedoni, Lewis's Ambrosio, Godwin's Falkland, Brockden Brown's Carwin, all these the traditional villains, the diabolic embodiments of evil and their pure, innocent victims interfuse in O'Connor, to create a hero much more ambiguous, an 'evil victim.' Her heroes are not aggressors, sadists, or seducers; O'Connor emphasizes the haunted dimension of the characters, thus suppressing their diabolism and accentuating the formative forces that have influenced them. As a consequence they are victims of their conditions, their parents, their past, victims who lie, hurt and deceive, until they encounter their counterpart who exposes for them the reality of their life and

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[94] Kerr, p. 13.

changes their life forever. O'Connor's concept of the hero/villain is not one of absolute evil but one of corrigible vice, induced and exorcised by worse evil.

"Man is a creature of passions over which his rational will has no dominion. The essential thing... is a sense of havoc and conflict, of human storm, blood madness and the irrational, of the unconscious possessing the human spirit." This is Alfred Kazin's description of the heroes of William Faulkner as quoted by Kerr, who calls it "a nocturnal view of man."[95] For O'Connor the moments of human life described in the excerpt, the moments when an individual is dominated by his or her passions and instincts, when no rational thinking influences his or her decisions, these are the moments of immense importance and absolute sincerity in human life. All the extreme situations the author makes her characters face are such moments of truth- truth revealed both to them and to the readers. Ihab Hassan asserts that "grace lies deep in the soft core of violence," [96] and O'Connor dedicated all her work to the seeking of grace behind man's fall and dishonor. She believes that grace must hit us between the eyes when we are most debased.

Flannery O'Connor's Gothicism refers to both the traditional Romantic Gothic as well as twentieth century Southern Gothic; her literary influences include the writers of the Southern Renaissance, William Faulkner, and the older Gothic writers like Edgar Allan Poe. Nevertheless, she was a modern author who wanted to create an independent form suitable for her major aim: to reveal the nature of the South of her time, its depravity and immorality, as well as the continuity of the old chivalric traditions. She concentrates upon the dynamic of the relationship between the past and the present in the South of the second half of

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[95] Kerr. p.8.
[96] Hassan, Ihab. *Radical Inocence.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961. p. 27.

the twentieth century and its influence upon the relationships between people. She embraces the Gothic occupation with the past and its perpetual influence over the present, with special emphasis placed on the familial past and its significance for the contemporary life of individuals.

The inspiration by Faulkner's fiction is manifest in O'Connor's manner of contrasting two sets of characters- the older ones, whose major feature is affectionate attachment to the past, and the young, who suffer from the sense of entrapment in the mesh of the superfluous nostalgia and memory. The conflicts between her parents and children indicate the "evolution of the South from an insane transcendental dream to a low-level and frustrated rationality."[97] William Faulkner, too, was deeply concerned with the families whose members are alienated from each other, families where the deterioration of former qualities and the reluctance to acknowledge it add to their desolate condition, e.g. in *Sartoris*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Sound and the Fury*, etc. Like Quentin Compson in the last mentioned novel, O'Connor's young Southerners long to forget and shake off all reference to the familial past and reject the patterns and ideals of the past. Agonized by the futility of his effort Quentin commits suicide, while O'Connor chooses for her heroes equally Gothic initiation by violence into real life, thus putting an end to their avoidance and fear of reality. As pointed out above, prior to their encounter with experience they are innocent and evil, enfeebled and limited by their parent, rude liars to themselves and others, beating around them in half-hearted effort to liberate themselves. After their confrontation with experience their ties with the reassuring home and old-fashioned ideals of the older generation are severed to provide for the possibility of emancipation.

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[97] Hathaway, Baxter. "The Meanings of Faulkner's Structures." Quoted in Kerr, p. 56.

Though she is particularly skilled in brief and concise description of nature as a reflection of the mood and emotional state of her characters (a device present in the genre since the Romantic period and employed by American Gothicists since Brockden Brown and masterfully exploited by Poe) she disregards the symbolism of the ruined house (which appears in Poe, Faulkner, and Walker Percy), since she prefers to concentrate upon the morality of her characters.

The brilliant concise form of her Gothicism and masterful choice of every word formally enhance suspense and anticipation, and still the greatest horror seizes the reader in the moment when the story reaches its violent climax, when the encounter with truth about themselves staggers the literary characters and reveals for them the ugliness of human nature and reality. Each climax ends the symbolic flight and pursuit, whose symbolic meaning is in Flannery O'Connor's short stories distinctly modified: the people on the run are no innocent maidens; they are either the rational, modern Julians and Hulgas fleeing from the influence of the specific regional past, so closely related to the familial past, in which their mothers linger: the elderly ladies long to avoid the present. As a consequence, they all run away form one evil to another until they are stopped by a third party, whose intervention though fatal or devastating is viewed as positive. Elizabeth Kerr wrote about the novels of William Faulkner: "the abnormalities, the distortions, the grotesque incongruities, the horror of scene, action, and imagery, the terror aroused by danger- are heightened technically by mystery and suspense. But essentially the nightmare is created by the revelation of the blackness in the depths of human nature."[98] While O'Connor's aim is the revelation of the deepest anxieties and evil of the human soul as well, her method of arousing terror

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[98] Kerr, p. 13.

dramatically differs. Her short stories are nearly uneventful; the only significant event in each story is the critical moment of revelation. Her scene and setting are never horrifying, the suspense of her work and the catharsis are based upon the shocking presence of violence and mischief in the close proximity of one's home, which has been considered safe so far. The action is never adventurous (cf. Faulkner's *The Wild Palms*); things always happen quickly and suddenly- one fatal blow, three bullets, one rendezvous in the barn, a boy asleep in the street: that is enough to change one's life forever.

The usage of appalling, tragic events, interest in moments in which the irrational and the unconscious take over one's behavior, blurred boundary between good and evil, involving the readers through sharing with the characters the terror and horror, and appearances of ambiguous characters, these are the Gothic features employed by Flannery O'Connor. Her Gothicism is inspired by the traditions of the genre, but still highly original; her major aim is to provoke people to change themselves and their world; according to the author drastic action is the only possibility to do so, therefore she does not stop before anything. O'Connor's unique ability to combine humor and horror as well as the precision of her style have certainly enriched the Southern literature with freshness and originality.

Chapter 5 – Walker Percy: Aristocracy of Degeneration

Though Walker Percy was slightly older than Flannery O'Connor, he did not publish before 1960s, and yet their works seem to be separated by long distance both in time and space, and Percy is the one who seems younger. O'Connor's heroes' moralizing is in Percy replaced by absence of any morals

whatsoever. Where the female writer shocks in order to improve there Percy depicts and describes; New Orleans rich plantation aristocracy replaces O'Connor's poor rural nobility; the clash of an individual with reality is substituted for the conflict between the new and the old. However, their heroes are challenged by the same problems- they live in the modern South but have a remarkable concern for the traditional preoccupations of Southern fiction (prominent also in Faulkner): caste and class, the sense of "decline and fall," the individual's private relationship to a known community identity, the weight of the past, the presence of black people, attachment to place.

In 1961 Walker Percy published his first novel, *The Moviegoer*. It was largely ignored at first by reviewers until it won the National Book Award the next year, surpassing such literary achievements as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*. Ever since, Percy has been categorized as a Southern writer, due to the facts that he had grown up in Mississippi and had set his novels in New Orleans, However, Percy resented such a categorization of *The Moviegoer*.[99] The search in the center of the story is more universal than simply appealing to the people of the region which is its setting. He felt it could just as easily have been set in a suburb of any city other than New Orleans. The search inherent to the novel's center is not an explicitly Southern theme, it is a human theme. Early in the novel its main protagonist, John Binkerson "Binx" Bolling states that he is in search of something indefinable to him. It might be God, but then again it might not. *The Moviegoer* is thus a narrative about a man in search of something, a means to define himself. However, this analysis aims at revealing those elements of Walker Percy's novels *The Moviegoer*, *Love in the Ruins*, and

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[99] Makowski. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/makowsky.html>

Lancelot which are exclusively Southern and concern the novelist's treatment of the concept of the family and its heritage.

The Moviegoer centers upon Binx Bolling and his search for himself. The novel takes place in the week leading up to Ash Wednesday, which happens to be the main character's thirtieth birthday. As this day draws near he feels that he might be finally growing into his manhood, becoming a whole person after years of aimless wandering through life. He feels that he has had no direction and begins to search for meaning and true life. "This morning, for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search." As he explains, the idea of a search occurred to him for the very first time when he was lying wounded in Korea, but he forgot about it as soon as he returned home. Only at this certain period of life, in the time of Mardi Gras, full of revelry and excess, just before his birthday the search becomes possible again, and its beginning is marked by an important moment of his life- by the morning when Binx looks at his belongings he was just about to insert into his pockets as every day of the past years and actually sees them: "Once I saw it, however, the search became possible."[100] The real purpose of the search is never stated explicitly by Binx, and he himself admits his ignorance of its true object, but it is clear that its crucial part is the realization of one's own everydayness and that its goal can be reached only through the assertion of one's identity and uniqueness, an act that, as Percy makes clear, is not easy to perform in the Southern context.

Binx, a member of rich New Orleans nobility moved to Gentilly, a suburb of the city, in the hopes of maintaining his anonymity, blending in with his surroundings. In fact he did more than blend; before the beginning of his search he

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[100] Percy, Walker. *The Moviegoer.* New York: Vintage Books, 1998. pp. 10-11.

was "a model tenant and a model citizen" and took pleasure in doing all that was expected of him.[101] He became so engulfed in the monotonous qualities of life that he did not really live anymore. The only way to stand his life is going to the movies, hiding in the world of John Wayne and Gregory Peck. Binx suddenly realizes that his own life has had no meaning so far, and thus he embraces the idea of doing something with his orderly, uneventful and stereotypical existence. "The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. (...) To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair."[102] The habit of going to the movies, an essential part of his search, has another dimension next to that of the movies themselves. At every possible opportunity, Binx reaches out to those around him, in attempts to make contact with other human beings. Whenever he goes to a film, he must talk to the people that work in the cinema, the manager or the girl at the ticket booth. He claims that he engages in this behavior because he wants to solidify the moviegoing, make it a real experience that happened to him rather than something than anyone could do. Binx wants to talk to people, because he feels that making himself known to other humans and meeting new people everyday, learning something about their life might for him be the means of asserting his individuality.

The fundamentally Southern theme of family or 'blood' as a kind of fate is central to *The Moviegoer*. The search that Binx is on and the reality of his life in general is connected with the past and the young man's relationship to his origin. The novel begins with a memory of the death of his older brother Scott when the protagonist was a boy. Upon Scotty's death, Binx and his even-tempered Aunt

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[101] *The Moviegoer*. p. 6.
[102] *The Moviegoer*. p. 13.

Emily go for a walk in which she tries to explain to him what has happened. She tells him "Scotty is dead. Now it's all up to you. It's going to be difficult for you but I know you're going to act like a soldier."[103] This comment clearly delineates her philosophy of stoicism and emotional detachment from life. From this day onward Binx's life and personality seems split into two contradictory parts: one that simply contradicts the aunt's stiff-upper-lip devotion to duty, family, and traditional Southern values, one which realizes how insufficient such devotion is and how emotionally empty it leaves a man; and one which, however involuntarily, longs to come up to his aunt's expectations and act like a Bolling. Binx's relationship to his aunt is a mixture of love, reverence and frustration: "I feel myself smiling with pleasure as I await one of her special kind of attacks which are both playful and partly true. She calls me an ingrate, a limb of Satan, the last and sorriest scion of a noble stock."[104] Aunt Emily's relationship to Binx is one of indulgent affection; she seems to consider his present life a capriciousness of a young man who needs her guidance in order to get back to the right path- to come back home, go to the medical school which she chose for him, eventually to marry a girl from a good family. Binx's attitude towards his aunt's conduct can be characterized as passive resistance and quiet irony: "As always we take up again where we left off. This is where I belong after all."[105] He is meek and facile, unable to contradict Aunt's ideas, and yet he does his best to oppose them in his everyday life.

Louis Rubin asserts that Walker Percy premised his works of fiction on "the conviction that the older Southern rural attitudes and patrician virtues- the notion of 'role' that Will Percy had automatically assumed- had been rendered

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[103] *The Moviegoer.* p. 4.
[104] *The Moviegoer.* p. 26.
[105] *The Moviegoer.* p. 26.

totally irrelevant by the vast changes that had occurred since Will Percy's day and his own."[106] Aunt Emily is representative of the old aristocratic ideals of old families- she is a well-born Southern lady, as handsome and formidable as her late brothers were, "as if, with her illustrious brothers dead and gone, she might now at last become what they had been and what as a woman had been denied her: soldierly both in look and outlook."[107] After all male Bollings died, she voluntarily became the bearer of the family honor, values and character; she has unfailing trust in these ideals, and in all the members of the family- including Binx ("She thinks you're one of her kind. (...) A proper Bolling."[108]), and in Kate, her stepdaughter, whose psychic problems she is therefore reluctant to acknowledge. Her position of the head of the family is unshaken and her right to tell people what to do is undisputed. Binx does not feel as one of his aunt's kind; both he and Kate consider the values that Aunt Emily worships virtually useless (for Kate they prove even harmful). The older woman is disenchanted with the modern world, but still believes that holding onto the ideals is a noble way to live one's life; believes in 'acting like a soldier.' Her genuine Southern stoicism, a branch of Southern honor is also exposed as a way to avoid seeing the reality and living in the present. The aunt proudly declares: "I am not ashamed to use the word class. I will also plead guilty to another charge. The charge is that people belonging to my class think they're better than other people. You're damn right we're better. We're better because we do not shirk our obligations either to ourselves or to others. . . .we live by our lights, we die by our lights, and whoever the high gods may be, we'll look them in the eye without apology."[109] The

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[106] Rubin, Louis D., Jr. *The Literary South.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979. p. 620.
[107] *The Moviegoer.* p. 27.
[108] *The Moviegoer.* p. 43.
[109] *The Moviegoer.* pp. 222-223.

ineffectuality of her "weapon"- the ruined letter opener in the shape of a sword she is holding in her hand- suggests the impotence of her philosophy in the modern world. She can understand neither Binx, who bent the sword as a child, nor the fragile Kate, who is lost in her own life.

Binx's father was also onto the search, just as his son is now. Before he was married, the father wandered through Europe in an attempt to find himself; it can be assumed that he never did. He enlisted in the Canadian Air Force during the Second World War and was killed before the United States entered the war. When looking at a photograph of his father with his brothers, Binx feels that the father is not one of them - he is not serene in his identity like the others, he does not coincide with himself like his brothers do. Binx's view of his father's death is expressive of his own attitude towards the family: "He had found a way to do both: to please them and please himself. To leave. To do what he wanted to do and save old England doing it. And perhaps even carry off the grandest coup of all: to die. To win the big prize for them and for himself."[110] Binx's father had spent his life insomniac because after his *Wanderjahr* in Europe he decided to conform to his family's expectations, with the sole exception of his marriage to a nurse. Only in his joining to army and eventually his death he managed to leave the life chosen for him as he (and Binx after him) longed for, and, as any death in uniform is considered heroic, he joined the exclusive company of Bollings who died a heroic death.

Binx inherited his father's disillusionment with all the aristocratic ideals. He considers them good for Aunt Emily and Uncle Jules, but unfit for him- a young man in search for a unique individuality. His detachment from the noble

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[110] *The Moviegoer.* p. 157.

house of his aunt is enhanced by the plebeian origin of his mother. "As a Bolling in Feliciana Parish I became accustomed to sitting on the porch in the dark and talking of the size on the universe and the treachery of men; as a Smith on the Gulf Coast I have become accustomed to eating crabs and drinking beer under a hundred and fifty watt bulb- and one is as pleasant a way as the other of passing a summer night."[111] The warring sides of Binx's personality are inherited from his very different paternal and maternal lines, and it is the basis of his longing "to leave." Veronica Makowsky claims that "Binx Bolling, like all of Percy's protagonists, is obsessed with that very Southern theme, the sins of the fathers. This legacy of guilt, inadequacy, and anxiety is the 'burden of the past' under which so many male characters in Southern literature labor."[112] His search is thus motivated and stigmatized by the Bolling family heritage and aggravated still more by his bond to Mary, whom he is unable to leave and follow his own way.

The Moviegoer is the least overtly Gothic of Walker Percy's novels and his Gothic elements have often gone unnoticed;[113] the writer is nevertheless very innovative in his play with traditional Gothic devices, and these innovations were used again in *Love in the Ruins* and *Lancelot*. The archetypal Gothic flight from the things past, as explored by many Southern writers (including Flannery O'Connor), is enriched with another dimension- by the quest for the main character's present: Binx Bolling, Tom More and Lancelot Lamar must first learn to put up with the ghosts of the past, then set out to learn what their place in life is before they can work to change it. Binx's ghosts have the faces of his Judge Anse,

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[111] *The Moviegoer.* pp. 153-154.
[112] Makowsky. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/makowsky.html>
[113] Moss, William. "The Vacant Castle of Postmodernity: Subversions of the Gothic in Thomas Pynchon and Walker Percy." Litereria Pragensia. Charles L. Crow, Martin Procházka, ed. Vol. 14, No. 28 (2004). p. 33.

Dr. Wills, his father, and, most wicked of them all, Aunt Emily. The young man proves incapable of standing to them and thus takes to flight from them to another nightmare- the suffocating stereotype of exemplary life in Gentilly interrupted only by fantasy trips to the movies. The Gothic fear and anxiety induced by the ancestral sins are manifest in Binx's recurring depressions and malaise. The protagonist is lost in the gloomy and dismal world; in his present the oppressive monotonousness threaten to devour all his energies, and his past, impersonated by Aunt Emily and what remains of the Bolling family suffers from emergent disintegration, his future is uncertain due to his inability to act effectively in his search. Percy avoids depiction of any dramatic emotions like real fear or terror, yet equally unnatural and threatening to sanity is the absence of any other emotions, even positive ones. The characters are generally indifferent to each other: Emily is not even worried when she finds a carton full of empty liquor bottles and sedatives in Kate's room; Binx's relationship to his secretary Sharon is lukewarm at best, Kate seems so exhausted by her mental instability that it is impossible for her to display any lively emotions at all.

In the course of the novel, Kate and Binx come closer together, realizing their underlying connection. Both are equally mentally unstable, engaging in fantasies and having drastic mood swings from happy or angry to depressed all in one scene; she, however, has actually made attempts on her life. She too is onto the search; she understands his moviegoing; like the young man she still cannot find an outlet for her own search for identity, and Binx begins to feel that they can help each other. Binx and Kate marry, but their marriage is not a permanent solution to their problems. Kate is dependent upon Binx for her survival. She needs him to be thinking of her at all times, as if, without knowing she is Binx's thoughts, Kate

feels her existence is not justified. Binx decided to conform to his aunt's advice and become a doctor, trying to help people. Although this is admittedly a noble pursuit, it is not a choice he made on his own. His search has been totally abandoned; he is living a life of mediocrity and trying to believe that he is happy, but there is every indication that the despair he felt throughout the novel will someday return, leaving him even emptier than before. The end of *The Moviegoer* is symbolic of the desperate struggle to escape one's fate and its inconclusiveness. The quote from Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* in the prologue of the novel refers both to Binx's situation both in the beginning and in the end: "...the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair." Like many Faulkner's characters, Binx at the end of the novel carries a sense of submission to his fate.[114] But unlike them, he rejected the impulse that drove him forward, to the cinema and in his search, from the horror of everydayness, as futile and at the same time he refused to make a responsible choice and leaves it to others to do it for himself.

Percy's depiction and dissection of the supposedly transformed South of the present, in his own language, attitude, social sense, eye for detail, and view of men and women as being chiefly the product of their familial past demonstrate the survival and even flourishing of much that many people declare irrelevant and even absurd in the South of the second half of the twentieth century. Unlike in O'Connor, his protagonists, however catastrophic the events that attend and await them, always end up living in familiar places and settling in to stay for good. As the characters of Aunt Emily in *The Moviegoer* and Mrs. More in *Love in the Ruins* illustrate, Percy is incapable of believing any longer in the old Southern

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[114] Cowley, p. xxiii.

aristocratic ideals of *noblesse oblige* and stoic fortitude. Lancelot Lamar, Tom

More, and Binx Bolling live in the state of emotional and spiritual sickness and

seek to know how to cope with the problem of "how to live from one ordinary

minute to the next on Wednesday afternoon."[115]

The spiritual malaise that Percy portrays so masterfully and disturbingly in all of

his work is a major theme in *Love in the Ruins*. Dr. Tom More, its main character,

is a displaced psychiatrist: an alcoholic, a womanizer, and a half-hearted clinician.

He develops the lapsometer, a kind of stethoscope of the human spirit with which

he plans to cure humankind's spiritual illnesses. In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, the

sequel to *Love in the Ruins*, the sinister Dr. Bob Comeaux tells Tom More that

"what we've done is restore the best of the Southern way of life" when he slips

chemicals into the Baton Rouge water supply that make people well-behaved and

happy, unconcerned with the true Southern past, but diminished, regressed to pre-

humanity. Dr. More was similarly injudicious in *Love in the Ruins* when he

believed he could return mankind to prelapsarian bliss with his lapsometer.[116]

More is a small town unambitious psychiatrist, an admitted "bad Catholic" who

says, "I believe in God and the whole business, but I love women best, music and

science next, whiskey next, God fourth, and my fellow man hardly at all."[117]

Mentally unstable, "prey to bouts of depression and morning terror, to say nothing

of abstract furies and desultory lusts for strangers," Dr. More is aware of the

incongruity between his family's history and present "if such antecedents [as Sir

Thomas More] seem illustrious, recent reality is less so."[118] But Tom's longing to

forget brings him to his breakthrough invention- with his lapsometer he can save

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[115] Percy, Walker. *The Last Gentleman.* Quoted in Rubin, p. 664.
[116] Makowsky. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/makowsky.html>
[117] Percy, Walker. *Love in the Ruins.* New York: Picador, 1999. p. 6.
[118] *Love in the Ruins.* pp. 20-22.

America from her fall. He defines the deepest and most harmful trauma of the country "it was always the nigger business, now, just as in 1883, 1783, 1683, and it has been always that ever since the first tough God-believing Christ-haunted cunning violent rapacious Visigoth-Western-Gentile first set foot here with the first black man,"[119] and is going to erase all the guilt, anxiety and fear of the blacks from the minds of his fellow Americans. Percy's preoccupation with remembering and dealing with the truth of the past does not let his protagonists forget the sins of the fathers; even modern science cannot free the Southerners from the concern about their past.

The depiction of anxiety inflicted upon the citizens of Paradise Estates by the presence of the rebels (both black Bantus and young white derelicts) in the swamps surrounding its hyper-modern golf course is enhanced by the general break-up in the society (in religion: the Catholic church is split into three pieces and in politics: the liberals and conservatives agree only on the fact that the Negroes are a bad lot). These factors work together to convey a sense of imminent apocalypse. As opposed to the romantic Gothic, where the hero is threatened by a single villain, Tom More faces the post-modern feeling of general dissolution of the society, human psyche, and on the basis of these symptoms he awaits the end of the world.

Apart from the looming dangers and the ghostly past the writer disposes of further Gothic devices, such as the ancient aristocratic mansion. In the world of *Love in the Ruins* everything seems deformed and sick, and thus one of the characters, Dr. George "Dusty" Rhoades, originally from Texas, lives in "Tara," an artificial plantation house designed by a Las Vegas set designer. Obviously

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[119] *Love in the Ruins.* p. 57.

some people take comfort in restoring a false past; they feel nostalgia for a history that never really existed. Conversely, Tom More's mother depresses her son with her aristocratic stoicism, efficiency, "good terms with the world" and the fact that "she sparkles with good health and is at one with herself."[120] The mother is sure about her place in society; she lives a life not too different from her ancestors' lives- in the same house with a colored servant, a Southern Belle, disregarding the changes around her similarly to Monsignor Schleifkopf, who preaches for the well off: "Dearly beloved: our lord himself, remember, was not a social reformer, said nothing about freeing the slaves, nor are we obliged to."[121] He is the ironic, burlesque caricature of the lustful monk of the English Gothic, translated into the Southern Gothic by William Faulkner in *Light in August* in the character of Gail Hightower, whose crimes are sinking into indolent deterioration and using his clerical office to exercise his power over others. The gap between the mother's generation and the younger generation is immense: the parents long to maintain some connection with their past and memories occupy a large portion of their life, whereas the young do not find it worth remembering and long to sever all bonds with it. The brief appearance of the priest in *Love in the Ruins*, as well as the existence of Tara, the parody of a plantation house, in the novel is significant of Percy's attitude towards the conventions of the Gothic. As it will become more obvious is the analysis of his novel *Lancelot*, the writer finds the Gothic myths empty and meaningless in the post-modern world: "any hint of the sublime, any sense of wonder, of the numinous, is lost"[122] for Percy's protagonists; the absence of meaning in the Gothic symbols denotes the absence of meaning and futility of any search for meaning in the world.

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[120] *Love in the Ruins*. p. 176.
[121] *Love in the Ruins*. p. 182.
[122] Moss, p. 33.

In *Love in the Ruins* Walker Percy confronts two ways of knowing- the scientific versus the poetic. He argues that science cannot express the full truth about a unique human existence. "The great gap in human knowledge to which science cannot address itself by the very nature of the scientific method is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, nothing less than this: what it is like to be an individual, to be born, live, and die in the twentieth century."[123] The novel's (and Dr. More's) world is gloomy and menacing: "These are bad times. Principalities and powers are everywhere victorious. Wickedness flourishes in high places."[124] The threat and danger do not loom only from the swamp, but is clear and present in the minds of all men, who are unable to correlate "with the manifold woes of the Western world, its terrors and rages and murderous impulses."[125] Like the protagonists of *The Moviegoer* and *Lancelot* Dr. Tom More is a highly untrustworthy narrator. William Moss describes Percy's narrative strategy as tales "related by a sometimes all-too-rational sounding narrator of decidedly questionable sanity,"[126] introduced into the Gothic genre by its early master, Edgar Allan Poe (e.g. in his short story "The Cask of Amontillado"). The men are all uncertain about their own identity and relationship to their surroundings, their insecurity causing them neurosis, bowel weaknesses and alcoholism; Lancelot Lamar' and Tom More' sanity has already been infirmed by their hospitalization in a mental institution. They struggle to escape the "intolerable tenderness of the past, the past gone and grieved over and never made sense of."[127] Moreover, Tom walks through most of the novel stimulated with his invention, and the credibility

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[123] Percy, Walker. *Signposts in a Strange Land.* Patrick Samway, ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991. p. 151.
[124] *Love in the Ruins.* p. 5.
[125] *Love in the Ruins.* p. 28.
[126] Moss, p. 29.
[127] *Love in the Ruins.* p. 339.

of his narration is considerably impaired by the massages of his brain, mainly the center of the musical-erotic. His incapability to cope with reality and to be alone as well as his paranoia caused by the traumata of the past affect Tom's sanity, prevent him from living a peaceful life and also from presenting a true picture of his reality.

The narrator of *Lancelot* was confined to a mental institution after burning his house with his wife and her murdered lover inside. His insanely matter-of-fact account of the events leading to his imprisonment has much in common with the other two novels treated in this thesis. The main hero is the last member of an old Louisiana family, "an enclave of the English gentry set down among hordes of good docile Negroes and comical French peasants." The family is "honorable," but they had been poor until they found gas under the old, burned wind of their house, the Belle Isle.[128] Lance lives in the old family mansion, unlike Binx Bolling he has never rebelled, has lived his life as it came to him, much like generations of Lamars before him did (although his life may be even more boring-his father was a corrupt politician, thus adjusting the family honor to his own image, thus performing an act of defiance to the community's expectations, something that his son is incapable of until his moment of 'revelation'). Lancelot is a liberal lawyer, although he works only a few hours a day his work is beneficial to society, he fulfills the imperative of *noblesse oblige*, the way Binx Bolling does when he concedes to his aunt's wish and becomes a doctor. Lancelot had been everything that was expected of him: "Most Likely to Succeed, Rhodes scholar, holder of the record of the Longest Punt Return in the entire U.S.A."[129] But his life before the moment when he discovers that he is not the father of his

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[128] Percy, Walker. *Lancelot.* New York: Tartar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977. p. 14.
[129] *Lancelot.* pp. 14-15.

daughter is bearable only with the help of a Philip Marlowe detective novel and a considerable amount of alcohol. "If I was happy, it was an odd sort of happiness."[130]

Lancelot's attitude toward his family past is the same as his attitude toward past in general: "There is nothing wrong with my memory. It's just that I don't like to remember." He even welcomes his father's disgrace of the family honor: "The old world fell to pieces- not necessarily a bad thing. [...] For if there is one thing harder to bear that dishonor, it is honor, being brought up in a family where everything is so nice, perfect in fact, except of course oneself." He has little understanding for his wife Margot's enthusiasm for the reconstruction of the house, for the "marvelously preserved, two-foot-thick walls of slave brick" in his asylum, the pigeonnier, and the plantation desk Margot had given him.[131] Lance's deliberate disregard for the past is caused by his awareness of its triviality and futility for his present life: "the past is intolerable, not because it is violent or terrible or doom-struck or any such thing, but just because it is so goddamn banal and feckless and useless,"[132] and yet he cannot help remembering things both from his own past and the past of his ancestors. Lancelot's character shares this relationship towards the past with Jason Compson, the narrator of part three in Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*. Jason's part is the least retrospective; the stream of his thoughts is concentrated upon the present most of the time, and only occasionally it does turn backwards into the past.

Nothing has changed much in the Lamar residence in the last hundred years: the sugar cane plantation, race track and stables around the house have been replaced by Ethyl pipery, still Belle Isle remains an island where Lance lives, with

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[130] *Lancelot.* p. 25.
[131] *Lancelot.* pp. 9, 42, 18, 26.
[132] *Lancelot,* p. 105.

Suellen, the colored cook "thousands of Suellens had raised thousands like me, kept us warm in the kitchen, saved us from our fond bemused batty parents," and her son Elgin, an MIT student, pathetically devoted to the family of the former owners of his family.[133] The character of the black servant is present in each of Walker Percy's novels: in *The Moviegoer* it is the sulky Mercer, in *Love in the Ruins* the sassy Eukie, in *Lancelot* it is Elgin. Elizabeth Kerr identifies the role of the faithful servant as one of the stock characters in the Gothic genre, present in the Gothic since *The Castle of Otranto*, appearing in Faulkner as well (e.g. in the character of Dilsey, the flippant but affectionate cook of the Compson family), their human dimension enhanced ever since the beginning by the "occasional impertinence" towards their masters.[134] Despite the slow movement of time and the seeming absence of change the Lamar family itself, though, has deteriorated continually, the process culminating in Lancelot's burning down the house. (Before, his father was "screwed up by poesy," "a failed man who missed the boat all around."[135])

Belle Isle, the ancient plantation house, is by no means a decayed ruin, yet it holds some of the attributes necessary for a Gothic setting.[136] After the vigorous reconstruction accomplished by Lance's wife Margot the house is a spectacular landmark, raided by hundreds of tourists from the Midwest. The only remains of the Gothic threat are the secret compartment, which not only fascinates the tourists but also is to play an important role in Lancelot's search for truth, and the gas well, capped danger looming under the newly rebuilt wing of the house. Apart from this physical menace concealed beneath the house there is also one

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[133] *Lancelot*. pp. 45, 55, 44.
[134] Kerr, p.60.
[135] *Lancelot*. p. 56.
[136] Moss, p. 30.

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threatening secret hidden in the family history, and as it appears on the surface with the daughter's application to a horse camp it proves as lethal as the gas well. Lance's view of his family had been more or less idyllic: "happy as could be, master of Belle Isle, the loveliest house on the River Road, [...] married to a beautiful rich loving (I thought) wife, and father (I thought) to a lovely little girl,"[137] only mildly marred by his alcoholism caused by the feeling of futility, idleness, and lack of meaning of his life. "His thoroughly modern world is haunted not by the past but only by banality and everydayness."[138]

The symbolic meaning of the family mansion in the European Gothic (adapted for the Southern context by William Faulkner) is pride, isolation (sometimes both geographical and in spirit- its inhabitants being isolated from each other as well as from the community), and lack of love. The ruinous house is parallel to the decay of the family and the dilapidation of the relationships inside. Lancelot's wife took pains to restore the former beauty and glory of the Lamar house, but all her efforts went into the building while the family deteriorated. As a consequence, the traditional Gothic symbolism of the mansion is subverted, the splendid house being an ironic antithesis to the state of relations between Margot, her husband and their children. The way Percy works with the symbolism of the family estate is parallel to his work with the character of the monk in *Love in the Ruins*. William Moss recognizes the writer's usage of the Gothic symbols as devoid of meaning, any capacity to arouse wonder or dread in the reader removed from them, so that Walker Percy can use them either with ironic detachment or as empty signifiers without reference in the present day context.[139] This feeling of inefficiency of Gothic conventions for the post-modern man, who is incapable of

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[137] *Lancelot*. p. 24.
[138] Moss, p. 31.
[139] Moss, p. 33.

the Romantic great acts and passion so inspirational for the European and early American Gothicists, is the reason why Percy is more an heir of the Walpolean and Poe's Gothic fiction, rather than continuing and referring to Faulkner's achievement.

Lancelot is mad because his sense of good and evil had been drowned in alcohol and suffocated by the routine of his stereotypical existence. With the revelation of his wife's infidelity he eventually hits on something to do: make a personal investigation into the nature of evil; the way to do this is by committing evil. The shock of the revelation has a natural effect on Lance: the blinds fall off his eyes and he suddenly sees his life as it is: stereotypical, empty, meaningless. "There was a sense of astonishment, of discovery, of a new world opening up, but the new world was totally unknown."[140] The discovery works on Lancelot similarly to the way the shock prepared for them by O'Connor influences her protagonists. Yet the outcome of the hero's awakening for the rest of the characters of the novel is something unexpected; Lancelot Lamar sets out for the search for evil. He rages against the unliveability of modern life, hating its easy sexuality, its all-soft-corners way of living, its inability to see death a genuinely threatening force instead of an annoying inconvenience. If you found something truly evil, not something that can be written off as madness or sickness, what would that say about the existence of good?[141] Lancelot's theory is as brilliant as it is insane: if he can prove the existence of a real sin, "a purely evil deed," he can prove the existence of God, the ultimate good at the same time.[142] In accord with Percy's treatment of the genre markers the protagonist is lost not in the world of Gothic terror, but in the world where nothing is terrifying: "For Lancelot, who

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[140] *Lancelot.* p. 51.
[141] *Lancelot.* p. 138-140.
[142] Lancelot. p. 52.

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experiences neither pity nor terror, there are no ghosts, there is no evil."[143] He wants to smash the world he's come to live in and replace it with something better.

Lancelot spends his days in the asylum dreaming about future which would be completely detached from the past, which would be entirely new, with past absolutely dead. The story he narrates proves that even burning the down the house does not fee one's mind from memories, regardless of how much he does not like to remember or how useless the past seems. The very name of the narrator relates the present to the past; it suggests the incongruity between the old, traditional image of a nobleman and his present form; Lancelot's father might have hoped to bring up a man to honor and renew the family tradition of aristocratic composure, effectiveness and solemnity, (he himself was not only a fraud, but also a helpless romantic, escaping his ordinary life by reading stories of extraordinary adventure) but it proved impossible in the modern world. In the time when chivalry is meaningless, what happens to the epitome of chivalry? What happens to a crusader for goodness, when the idea of goodness is becomes horribly messed? He becomes a drunk, lost in despair over his own existence, defeated by the weight of the glorious past. This Lancelot does not stay drunk forever, though. When he sobers, since he cannot discover what good is anymore, he decides to find the essence of evil. If he can prove that evil, that sin, exists in a definite form, then good must likewise exist. He goes looking for evil- evil he cannot find because it is where he only did not seek- within himself.

Lancelot's relationship with his queen is bizarre: he is the deceived, not the romantic adulterer, and she is no virtuous Guinevere. Margot was the Belle,

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[143] Moss, p. 29.

the debutante-age daughter of Texas money, who, by marriage to Lancelot, exchanged her money for the still prestigious position of the mistress of beautiful, dilapidating but respectable family estate. Margot's character is another instance of Percy's relish for the subversion of stock characters and myths of the genre. In *Lancelot*, Margot is not persecuted with the intention of conquering her virtue, but for the reason of giving up the virtue herself, being the epitome of the nowadays nonexistent virginal maiden. In fact the author employs most of the traditionally recognized Gothic characters (outcasts- Tom More and Chuck in *Love in the Ruins*, a hero/villain- Merlin in *Lancelot*, courtly lovers- the heathen English seducer of Tom More's wife, Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*, a villain- Immelmann in *Love in the Ruins*, etc.) but they are always deformed, ironized, and stripped of any sublime effect which Percy considers impossible to achieve.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter Walker Percy's Gothicism is, in contrast to O'Connor's, affected by the post-modern morality. Though his protagonists embark upon the search for a new meaning of their lives, they invariably encounter limitations, obstacles and hindrances causing them psychosis, neurosis, and other mental disorders. The author is not positive about the possibility of any improvement or even change, as his characters' background, familial history and social standing work together to restrain the forming and sustaining their individual identity. Percy's pessimism about the destructive power of the past upon the younger generation has its prototype in the Southern author whose influence Percy contested so vehemently that he even refused to enter his house. Like many post-Southern Renaissance writers he felt overwhelmed by the Southern literary tradition, particularly its giant figure, William Faulkner. Percy

feared becoming the kind of professional Southerner and clichéd Southern writer he parodied in *The Moviegoer* through the character Sam Yerger.[144]

The influences upon Walker Percy, nevertheless, do include William Faulkner and other writers of the Southern Renaissance. Similarly to Faulkner, Percy's autobiography influences the themes of his work, at least his choice of his protagonists' background. Like the Falkners, the Percy family has played an important part in the shaping of the region ever since the first Percy arrived in the late eighteenth century. Their roles at various moments of Southern history have been almost archetypal- prosperous planters, politicians, military officers, progressive corporate lawyers, and businessmen.[145] And just as the Percys have had a decisive influence on the shape of their region's history, so have the various twists and turns of Southern history determined a great deal about the Percys' lives. Walker Percy, and his many fictional self-transformations, from Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer* to Dr. Tom More in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, tend to view history as a nightmare from which they hope to awake. Wanting to escape from the nightmare of history and being able to do so are two different things, and for all Percy's efforts to distance himself from the trappings of the Old South mystique and even from the more serious Faulknerian concerns with the tragic shape of Southern history he nonetheless remained mired in distinctively southern preoccupations with religion, race, family, defeat, and honor.

Thus, obviously he could not help creating characters who, like Quentin Compson, feel burdened by the Southern past, or who, like Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen, are stupefied and eventually destroyed by their family past transgressions. In order to communicate the deplorable state of human passions

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144 Makowsky. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/makowsky.html>
145 Tolson, Jay. *Pilgrim in the Ruins: A Life of Walker Percy.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. p. 14.

and the degree to which people are decimated into passivity by the ostensible futility of any action Percy employs the symbols and stock characters as invented by Horace Walpole and used by the Romantic Gothicists in the eighteenth century. His resurrection and subsequent subversion of the devices mentioned several times throughout the analysis of his novels serves him to accentuate the contrast between the Romantic and the Post-modern man and the power to act then versus the futility of action nowadays. His protagonists may start for the metaphorical flight from the distress, but they are not relieved from their effort to rid themselves of the plight of reality by an intervention of a noble knight. Walker Percy's attitude towards the actuality of his protagonists is thus pessimistic, as he does not see any way out of their stereotype, not event the violent one which seemed sufficient to Flannery O'Connor.

III.

Conclusion

Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy are two writers who dealt with the life of a South in which much was changed and yet much abided. Their works embody their way of looking at their place in time and history. They both succeeded in creating a fiction for and about their day, yet rooted in the Southern tradition. Louis Rubin quotes Robert Penn Warren who once observed about the value of the past for the writer:

> The past is always a rebuke to the present; it's bound to be, one way or another; it's your great rebuke. It's a better rebuke than any dream of the future. It's a better rebuke because you can see what some of the costs were, what frail virtues were achieved in the past by frail men. [...] The drama of the past that corrects us is the drama of our struggles to be human, or our struggles to define the values of our forbearers in the face of their difficulties.[146]

In the works of both authors appear symptoms of "the domestication of Gothic styles and devices within realistic settings and modes of writing," typical for American Gothic, and the specifically Southern reality in which the "haunting pasts are the ghosts of family transgression and guilty concealment."[147] The horrors of their fiction take place among the family members or at home- the place where the protagonists feel most safe. The Gothicism of Percy and O'Connor confronts the world of normality and conventions, seeks the manifestations of good and evil in the familial relationships, finds aggressive or aberrant individuals stigmatized by their familial past, haunting houses, mansions, and farms, paralyzed and unable to move forward, to leave the past behind.

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[146] Rubin, p. 621.
[147] Botting. *Gothic.* p. 123.

Although their methods diametrically differ, Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy prove that the Gothic genre, traditionally associated with immorality, impropriety and low literary quality can indeed advocate morality and reason, and at the same time "interrogate, rather than restore, any imagined continuity between past and present, nature and culture, reason and passion, individuality and family and society."[148] The writers understand and acknowledge the influence of the past upon the present, in the South much more dramatically felt than elsewhere. The history of the region concerns all Southerners and affects their lives regardless of their attitude towards it. Percy and O'Connor chose the Gothic mode as a suitable means of expressing the anxiety of an individual in modern society and his or her disturbances induced by the limitations and pressures imposed on him or her by the family or community. Although their strategies differ considerably due to the difference in their aims the artists share a common attitude towards the modern Southern hero and his or her ordeal for which the metaphor of a Gothic heroine in flight from distress seems well suited.

The dark forest and ruined castle or abbey never occur in the Gothic of Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor. Theirs is the modern Gothic landscape of urban setting- in O'Connor it is the neighborhood which had been fashionable forty years before, the dwelling place of the once-well-off, the old aristocracy condemned by the social changes to reduced circumstances, or a small farm inhabited by rural nobility, similarly attached to the old ideals; in Percy's novels it is the old family estate, an ancient plantation house in New Orleans, the seat of degenerating aristocracy. The feeling of menace arises out of the protagonists' feeling of constraint, limitation, and expectations imposed upon them by the

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[148] Botting. *Gothic.* pp. 46, 47.

house and familial history; the old house, "both building and family line became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present."[149] The concept of evil, central to the genre, is manifest in different forms in the works of the writers, but it always takes the form of a force preventing the heroes from living full lives, be it their desire to leave all past behind, the lack of meaning in life, or the feeling that evil does not exist after all.

The preoccupation with family in Southern letters (and thus its prominence in the works of Percy and O'Connor) originates in the endurance of Southern societal framework from antebellum times to the present. The white South has persistently functioned as a loose society of families held together by certain myths and codes. The defeat of the South in the Civil War, far from destroying these myths, actually increased their significance.[150] But if the prominent, aristocratic families prevailed, they have also fallen victim to serious maladies, to the dark and often suicidal despair that accompanied the maintenance of a highly formalized but essentially lonely social role. Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor are heirs to that tradition of accomplishment and desperation. Their work is an attempt to see through it, to find the glimmer of hope and change behind the stern, unalterable image of their region. Moreover, Percy extends the vision of the South to add the problem of living in a world that has become, or is becoming, modern.

Walker Percy's novels are thematically very similar to Flannery O'Connor's short stories- their central event is the awakening of the protagonist from life in which he had nothing to do.[151] In Percy the greater part of the story follows the moment of "epiphany," whereas O'Connor concentrates upon the state

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[149] Botting. *Gothic.* p. 3.
[150] Tolson, p. 15.
[151] *Lancelot*, p. 44.

of affairs before, the shock being the climax of each short story. All three Percy's novels dealt with in this thesis center upon a man who is unable to accept the rational, scientific or traditional explanations as sufficient solution to human experience. All the heroes face an expectation of a role prescribed for them to assume, a role that has been made to seem meaningless by the passage of time and social change.

As mentioned at the end of chapter five, the concepts of family, honor and race all come with their own special burden in the South. And though Percy approached them from a slightly different angle from that of the artists with a sense of the Southern tragedy, he was still no less engaged by them. As Jay Tolson points out: "If, to paraphrase Karl Marx, history repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce, Faulkner has given fine literary shape to its first repetition and Percy (among others) to its second."[152]

The Gothic devices the writer uses include the symbolic decayed house (either ironically subverted or referring to the family rather than the building), stock characters (also adapted to reflect Percy's vision of life in the second half of the twentieth century), suggesting the sublime power of nature (while in *Love in the Ruins* the power of the mineral resources underneath Paradise Estates still affects the behavior of all its citizens and arouses fear Tom, in *Lancelot* the raging hurricane fails to evoke any sublime fear in the film crew), and insane characters revealing the pathological, destructive influence of both the present nihilism and absence of direction in one's life as well as the misleading memory of the glorious past. Percy rejects the possibility of achieving catharsis by the sublime effect of the Gothic markers as unattainable in the time of numb emotions and nihility.

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[152] Tolson, p. 15.

By contrast, in accord with the traditional notion of the sublime and terror that these Gothic devices are associated with, Flannery O'Connor considers the catharsis- subjective elevation, overcoming fear and thus renewing the sense of self still feasible, in fact more imperative than ever. With this purpose she writes her short stories climaxed with violent or horrifying events whose objective is to change the lives of her protagonists. They, like the heroes of Percy's novels, had sought their individuality, their own unique selfhood, and their place in the community, and their search had been inhibited by the restrictions imposed upon them by the expectations of their family and community about their lives. The problem with modern man is his lack of a tragic sense, of ability to deal with the past, of independence, and of belief. As a consequence, in the center of O'Connor's investigation of the modern man's soul is a question whether there is an individual that is worth saving. The writer's yes is to be conditioned by the presence of the moment of catharsis- revelation in the individual's life, a revelation of all his or her deepest anxieties and errors, thus renewing one's individuality freed from the weight of the myths of the past as well as the requirements of the modern, atheist, hagridden present.

In both O'Connor and Percy the image of the Southern family is always that of an incomplete, malfunctioning home, with one parent missing, and the other one imposing his or her obsolete vision of life. Yet while O'Connor feels that both the child and the mother or custodian deserve a shocking lesson of reality to awake them as different people ready to face up to the world, the protagonists of Percy's fiction cannot be freed from the stigma of the familial past even though they realize it (Binx's search ends in a dead end, Tom More acknowledges his father's escapism and hides from the world in the swamp, only

Lancelot's insanity is a dubious way to disregard all memories as superfluous). Elizabeth Kerr quotes Douglas Perry's description of the themes elaborated by the Southern writers of his time: "Faulkner, Capote, and Styron used the Gothic form to capture the irony of our twentieth century existence: the conviction that the search for self-awareness may not only be fatal, but fruitless, because it is equivalent to self-negation."[153] This applies to O'Connor and Percy as well, because though they consider the Southern family romance hypocrisy and wishful thinking, they both know that it is virtually impossible to dismiss it, for, apart from embodying some values that are not easily cast aside (including honor, loyalty, and a sense of personal responsibility for others), it imposes such limitation of independent action and self-formation that it verges on paralysis that may, in the context of the modern (or, rather post-modern) man prove fatal; its fatality is caused by the fact that though the South is, more than any other region of the United States, haunted by individuals on the run from the distress discussed throughout this thesis, the courtly heroes and romantic lovers are nowadays too much rare to save them.

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[153] Kerr, p. 89.

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Resumé:

Gotické pojetí rodiny v americké jižanské literatuře:
Flannery O'Connor a Walker Percy

Literatura Jihu je významnou součástí americké literární scény již od dob Edgara Allana Poea. Žánr gotického románu byl hojně využíván od samého začátku, neboť se mnoha autorům jevil jako nejvíce vhodný pro vyjádření zvláštností jižanské společnosti a jejích konvencí. Gotično je součástí světové literatury od dob evropského Romantismu a jako takové ovlivnilo mladou americkou literaturu konce osmnáctého století. Samo prošlo hlubokým vývojem během těch necelých dvou století, které dělí Charlese Brockdena Browna, prvního autora gotického románu v Americe, od Flannery O'Connor a Walkera Percyho, dvou výrazných postav poválečné jižanské literatury, jejichž práce je hlavním tématem této diplomové práce. Z tohoto důvodu je třeba zabývat se nejprve původem a vývojem žánru gotiky v Evropě i ve Spojených státech než je možné plně pochopit povídky O'Connor a Percyho romány.

Tím se tedy zabývají první tři kapitoly práce, počátky žánru v Anglii osmnáctého století, jeho začátky v Americe a vývoj na Jihu. Kapitoly čtyři a pět jsou věnovány analýze prací dvou moderních spisovatelů, v jejichž díle se odráží jak gotika, jak ji stvořil Horace Walpole v roce 1764, tak moderní přístup k žánru i literární tvorbě jako takové. Hlavním cílem analýzy povídek „Everything that Rises Must Converge," „A Good Man Is Hard to Find," „Good Country People," a „Artificial Nigger" je odhalení zdrojů pocitu úzkosti člena moderní jižanské společnosti, jehož vztah s okolím je hluboce ovlivněn typicky gotickým vlivem minulosti, minulých hříchů a pocitů viny na přítomný život jednotlivce. Hlavní důraz v kapitole pět leží na zkoumání přístupu Walkera Percyho k duševnímu stavu hrdinů románů *The Moviegoer*, *Love in the Ruins*, a *Lancelot* a příčinám

jejich nevyrovnanosti. Jak obě kapitoly ukazují, oba spisovatelé vidí společenské a rodinné zázemí jako překážky pro samostatné formování osobní identity mladého jedince vyrůstajícího na Jihu, v prostředí trvale ovlivněném historií regionu. Poslední kapitola dovršuje porovnání přístupů obou autorů k problému (ne)existence osobní nezávislosti v kontextu bývalé otrokářské společnosti tolik ovlivněné vlastní minulostí a jejich strategie využití gotických elementů pro dosažení zamýšleného efektu- odhalení hlubokých traumat v psychice hrdinů i jejich předků, a, v případě O'Connor, i jejich léčení.

Gotický román vznikl v Anglii v poslední čtvrtině osmnáctého století jako romantická reakce na racionalismus kombinující středověkou romanci, její zálibu v ruinách, hlubokých lesích, horách a bouřích, s romantickým zájmem o nitro hrdiny, jeho pocit odcizení, autorovým pocitem nespokojenosti se stavem umění i společnosti jako takové. Hrůza, strach a úzkost v gotickém románu jsou prostředky pro odhalení nedostatků současnosti, politických, kulturních, náboženských i sociálních. Horace Wapole, Anne Radcilffe, Monk Lewis- tito autoři byly průkopníky žánru, který se v práci Williama Godwina a Mary Shelley změnil v politické vyjádření nutnosti změny v politické organizaci společnosti. Tento přístup k uměleckému výrazu v mnohém ovlivnil Charlese Brockdena Browna, který ve svém díle uplatnil produkty Godwinovy modernizace a aktualizace gotiky.

Ve Spojených státech musel gotický román projít dalšími změnami tak, aby se přizpůsobil místním podmínkám: úzkost z blízkosti nebezpečné divočiny nahradila tmavé evropské lesy a rasové napětí způsobené jak přítomností původních obyvatel- indiánů- a černých otroků na Jihu poskytlo vhodnou náhradu za typicky post-feudální třídní napětí v Evropě, v Americe ještě silnější díky

podvědomým pocitům viny a strachu způsobených existencí instituce otroctví. Většinu z těchto změn inicioval Charles Brockden Brown, jehož v kariéře spisovatele gotického románu následoval Edgar Allan Poe, první autor, jež bývá spojován s regionem Jihu. Témata pronásledování, zločinu a tyranie jsou v dílech obou autorů v centru zájmu, oba též nahrazují hrůzu a nebezpečí, v evropském gotickém románu spojovaném s fyzickým ohrožením hrdiny, zájmem o abnormální psychologii, fanatismus či šílenství. Už v Brockden Brownově románu *Wieland* se objevuje téma determinace a neschopnosti potomků zbavit se traumatizující rodinné historie, které je prominentní u mnoha dalších amerických, zejména jižanských autorů včetně Williama Faulknera, a je též jedním z hlavních témat u O'Connor a Percyho.

Na Jihu gotický žánr měl a má významné místo, neboť ze své podstaty vyjadřuje silný vztah k minulosti, její vliv na současnost. Jako takový se stal výrazným rysem v tvorbě Williama Faulknera, jednoho z velikánů americké literatury vůbec. Jeho veskrze originální a moderní metoda zachycení děje a vědomí hrdinů mu umožňuje vyjádřit jedinečnost jižanského plynutí času, kdy minulost není od současnosti nijak oddělena, navazuje na ni a trvale, intenzivně ji ovlivňuje. Faulknerova věta tedy odpovídá realitě Jihu- obě časové roviny se v každém okamžiku překrývají a nikdo z jeho hrdinů je není schopen oddělit. Tato zkušenost je zvlášť pro mladší generaci extrémně traumatizující, neboť se v nich mísí touha zbavit se minulých hříchů, na kterých se osobně nepodíleli a lítost nad koncem doby, ve které žili jejich předkové- doby, která se svou slávou snažila vyrovnat vrcholné evropské feudální společnosti. I tato kombinace obou traumat se objevuje i ve fikci obou autorů, jimž je věnována větší část této práce.

Flannery O'Connor ve svých povídkách zdůrazňuje rodinné vztahy dvou generací, důležitost rodinné minulosti jako formujícího vlivu na příslušníky mladší generace. Jako moralistka se soustředí na dynamiku vztahu mezi dvěma lidmi představujícími protikladné přístupy k životu v regionu- nostalgickým stářím a mládím toužícím kráčet vpřed. V centru jejích povídek stojí vždy mladý člověk (Julian, Joy/Hulga, the Misfit, Nelson), který se ve své snaze osvobodit se od minulosti chová neuctivě, někdy i krutě. Není to proto klasický romantický hrdina v nesnázích, ale ani typický zlosyn. Tento nový druh ,antihrdiny' je jeden z charakteristických rysů tvorby Flannery O'Connor, kterým obohatila gotického hrdinu o novou dimenzi a dodala mu novou hloubku. Jeho duše totiž není veskrze zlá, jeho nemorálnost je z velké části způsobena zoufalstvím nad vlastním životem a vlivem faktorů ovlivňujících jeho charakter, nad kterými samotný hrdina nemá žádnou moc. V analyzovaných povídkách autorka tedy kombinuje charakter zloducha a oběti, a jako jediné východisko z patové situace v životě protagonistů vidí šokující událost, která jim má otevřít oči a zbavit je svazujících pout minulosti. Gotično v práci O'Connor vychází jak z původního Romantického gotického románu, tak z moderní jižanské literatury, zejména W. Faulknera. Jejím cílem jakožto moralistky je odhalení konfliktů a klamů v dnešním životě a zjednání nápravy, a jako její jediný možný prostředek vidí násilí, hrůzu a teror. Protože jsou její témata v první řadě rodinná a její prostředí vždy domácká, je možné jí tedy označit za autorku gotických rodinných dramat.

Na rozdíl od díla jeho kolegyně je moralita Walkera Percyho, autora o několik let staršího, ale publikujícího později, výrazně post-moderní. Jeho hrdinové si na rozdíl od ,zlých obětí' O'Connor nutnost změny ve svém životě uvědomí, jejich hledání sebe sama ale vždy končí na mrtvém bodě- i jejich život

je omezován a často určován očekáváním a tlakem ze strany rodičů či ostatních členů rodiny. Bezvýchodnost životní situace jim způsobuje psychické problémy, což dokládá autorův názor na destruktivní, patologickou přítomnost minulosti a společenských konvencích v životě (post)moderního člověka. Percyho vize absolutní bezvýslednosti jakýchkoliv snah ho vede k využití tradičních komponentů Romantické gotiky osmnáctého století. Ty jsou v jeho románech pouhým prostředkem zdůraznění kontrastu mezi tehdejším a dnešním člověkem a jejich akceschopnosti respektive marnosti jejich činů. Gotické prostředky jsou tedy sice přítomny, ale zcela zbaveny významu. Oba autoři se tedy zabývají vlivem minulosti, rodinné i společenské, na život člověka v padesátých, šedesátých a sedmdesátých letech dvacátého století. Oba využívají tradic žánru gotického románu a zároveň přispívají vlastní originalitou a aktuálností svých témat. Oba konfrontují svět konvencí s individualismem, hledají a nacházejí jak dobro tak zlo v rodinných vztazích a objevují jedince hluboce poznamenané minulostí neschopné iniciovat ve svém životě zásadní změnu. Oba chápou sílu vlivu minulých událostí na přítomnost, která se na Jihu projevuje silněji než jinde.

V povídkách F. O'Connor i v románech Walkera Percyho je jižanská rodina vždy nekompletní, nefunkční prostředí, v němž každodenně dochází ke konfliktu mezi rodičem či opatrovníkem, reprezentujícím hodnoty starého Jihu, a mládím, pro něž jsou tyto aristokratické hodnoty mrtvé. Zatímco O'Connor se domnívá, že je možné pomocí šoku, násilí nebo i smrti iniciovat změnu, která je vždy vnímána pozitivně, Percyho protagonisté se nemohou oprostit od vlivů minulosti, ačkoliv si je uvědomují. Rodinnou minulost a její vliv na dnešního jedince je tedy téměř nemožné eliminovat, neboť v jižanské kultuře mají hodnoty

spojené s obojím své stálé místo, jakkoliv zbytečné nebo zastaralé se dnes mohou

zdát.