

**Imprisonment, Escape and Gothic Postmodernism in Jennifer Egan's *The Keep***

Anne Savolainen  
University of Tampere  
School of Language, Translation and Literary Studies  
Master's Programme in English Language and Literature  
MA Thesis  
December 2017

Tampereen yliopisto  
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteiden yksikkö  
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma

SAVOLAINEN, ANNE: Imprisonment, Escape and Gothic Postmodernism in Jennifer Egan's *The Keep*

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 67 sivua + lähdeluettelo  
Joulukuu 2017

---

Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee vankeutta ja pakenemista sekä niihin läheisesti liittyviä pelkoja ja traumoja postmodernin gotiikan kontekstissa Jennifer Eganin romaanissa *The Keep* (2006). Tutkielman tarkoituksena on osoittaa, kuinka kirjoittaja postmodernin gotiikan keinoin kuvaa näitä teemoja romaanin eri henkilöihahmojen kautta. Tutkielmassani pyrin osoittamaan myös, että postmoderni gotiikka kirjallisuuden alalajina on sekoitus gotiikan sekä postmodernin fiktion yleisimpiä konventioita.

Tutkielmassani analysoin Eganin teosta sen tärkeimpien henkilöihahmojen kautta. Tutkielmani teoreettinen aineisto koostuu kirjallisuustieteen alan tutkimuksista, teoksista ja artikkeleista, joissa käsitellään gotiikan sekä postmodernin fiktion konventioita sekä yleisimpiä teemoja ja tekstuaalisia elementtejä. Tutkielmani teoreettinen osuus koostuu kolmesta osiosta, joista ensimmäinen käsittelee perinteistä goottilaista kirjallisuutta, toinen postmodernia fiktiota sekä kolmas näiden kahden yhdistelmää, eli postmodernia gotiikkaa, jota kirjallisuuden alalajina ei ole vielä kovinkaan laajalti akateemisesti tutkittu.

Tutkielmani ensimmäisellä puoliskolla analysoin vankeuteen ja pakenemiseen liittyviä teemoja sekä niiden suhdetta postmoderniin gotiikkaan. Analyysini paljastaa että vankeuteen ja pakenemiseen liittyvät teemat ovat läheisessä suhteessa sekä gotiikan että postmodernin fiktion kirjallisiin elementteihin, joista esimerkkinä teknologian kehitykseen liittyvät pelot ja ihmisen psyyken hauraus. Analyysini paljastaa myös, että nämä teemat ovat läheisessä yhteydessä postmodernin gotiikan tekstuaalisiin tehokeinoihin, kuten metafiktion ja tekstin itsetietoisuuteen.

Mainitsemani teemat liittyvät myös läheisesti erityisesti gootiikkaan yleisesti liitettäviin pelkoihin ja ahdistuneisuuteen, joita analysoin myös postmodernin gotiikan kontekstissa. *The Keep* -romaanin henkilöihahmojen määrittävin tekijä on jokaisen heidän taustaltaan löytyvä trauma, joka vaikuttaa heidän toimintaansa lamauttavalla tavalla tai tavalla, joka saa heidät tekemään väärä valintoja. Postmodernin gotiikan kannalta tärkeää on näiden pelkojen ja traumojen subjektiivisuus, joka liittyy erityisen vahvasti postmodernin fiktion minäkeskeisyyteen ja aiemmin mainittuun itsetietoisuuteen.

Analyysini tarkoituksena on osoittaa, kuinka goottilaisessa kirjallisuudessa yleisesti kuvaillut pelot, erilaiset hirviöt ja ylikuonnolliset ilmiöt saavat uudenlaisen elämän, kun ne siirretään postmodernin fiktion maailmaan. Näiden perinteisten goottilaisten elementtien kautta kirjailijan on mahdollista ottaa kantaa nyky maailman erilaisiin ilmiöihin aina huumeidenkäytöstä teknologiariippuvuuteen ja postmodernin pirstoutuneeseen minäkuvaan.

Avainsanat: postmoderni gotiikka, subjektiivisuus, trauma, Jennifer Egan, *The Keep*

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Theory of Gothic Postmodernism
3. Imprisonment and Escape
4. Gothic Postmodern Fears and Anxieties
5. Conclusion

Works Cited

## 1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will study Jennifer Egan's novel *The Keep* (2006) as a Gothic postmodern novel, focusing on imprisonment, escape, and the fears and anxieties of the modern world. My study will be executed through close textual analysis of Egan's novel. Through this textual analysis, I will examine the Gothic postmodern literary spaces of the novel, and later combine the ideas of imprisonment and escape to this analysis. In this thesis, I wish to prove that, with the combination of Gothic and postmodern conventions in *The Keep*, Egan makes a statement of the fears we encounter in our postmodern world. In the novel, these fears are often represented alongside the theme of imprisonment, which is one issue that will be later studied in this thesis. The idea of imprisonment manifests itself in the novel both in the physical and existential sense. These two different states of imprisonment are important to recognize, and will function as recurring themes in this thesis.

The genre of Gothic postmodernism has not yet been widely studied, and neither have been Jennifer Egan's works. Her Pulitzer-prize winning novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011) has received some academic attention, but her earlier works, such as *The Keep*, have not yet been studied in the academic sense. Due to this lack of academic attention, I find the subject of my thesis to be relevant as well as worthy of studying. Also, even though the classic Gothic tales of Ann Radcliffe, Horace Walpole and other 18<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic authors have received a lot of academic attention, the more contemporary fiction with Gothic influence is often regarded as “carrying less academic weight” (Spooner, 1). Modern Gothic fiction is thus often dismissed as being less relevant in the academic sense, and seen to belong more to popular culture and popular entertainment. Gothic fiction does still receive academic attention, but according to Maria Beville, this analysis is mostly confined to studies of horror film and fiction (8). Therefore, I would argue that studying a work of Gothic postmodernism will also contribute to this field of contemporary Gothic studies.

At this point, it is relevant to introduce one study that will function as one of the main sources

for this thesis. Maria Beville is one of the few academics who has noted the existence, and thus studied further, the specific genre of Gothic postmodernism. In her study *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2009), she analyzes three postmodern novels, Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) and Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991), and treats these novels as examples of Gothic postmodernism.

In this thesis, I will execute a similar analysis on Egan's more contemporary postmodern novel. In Beville's study, Amis' *Time's Arrow* is treated as a Gothic postmodern novel about the concept of immortality, while in Vonnegut's novel, unspeakable anxieties and terrors are presented to the reader through a satirical effort and defamiliarisation (107). According to Beville, Auster's *City of Glass* is Gothic metafiction of the highest degree (100), where the main character is “a ghost of himself and of others” and the city in the novel is a reflection of this character (101).

Egan's novel has similar themes to those Beville has studied in her analysis of the three novels. In *The Keep*, metafiction is used to emphasize the postmodernism of the novel, while themes relating to fears and anxieties are represented through Gothic elements. This positions Egan's novel to the continuum of both Gothic fiction and postmodern writing. The Gothic elements of Egan's novel are clearly visible, beginning from the setting of the story, while the postmodernity of the novel reveals itself in the thematic elements and the undertones of the storyline. The influence of Gothic fiction can also be seen in the literary devices Egan uses throughout the novel.

Even though Gothic postmodernism as a genre is not yet widely recognized, Patricia Waugh, has analyzed similar themes in her study on metafiction. According to Waugh, writers often experiment with the formulaic motifs of popular literary traditions, such as science fiction, ghost stories, detective stories, westerns and popular romance (81). Even though Waugh does not mention the genre of Gothic postmodernism, she notes that this kind of merger of genres is typical for postmodern fiction. As mentioned before, in the analysis I will perform in this thesis, Gothic postmodernism will be treated as a literary genre of its own.

At this point it will be relevant to give a short definition for the literary genre of Gothic postmodernism. This definition will clarify the scope through which the literary analysis in this thesis will be executed. Beville describes Gothic postmodernism as follows: “a mode of literature which, via metafictional strategies, offers the reader a new kind of reading experience appropriate to the postmodern condition; a genre in which Gothic elements fuel postmodernist explorations of reality and hauntology” (11).

Elements of traditional Gothic ghost stories can definitely be seen in *The Keep*. The words 'ghosts' and 'ghost story' are repeated many times in the novel, therefore this kind of comparison can be seen to be justifiable. The novel is not in any way a traditional ghost story as such, but there are many elements borrowed from that specific genre of fiction. It could be said that the novel “flirts with” the traditional ghost stories with its slightly eerie setting and events that are borderline supernatural. However, the novel is very self-conscious, as it becomes evident during the novel that there is a metafictional storyline in which one of the characters is actually writing the events that are taking place. In this metafictional storyline, the fictional writer constantly has to convince his readers – the other prisoners – that the story he is writing is not a ghost story:

There are no ghosts in this story, I say to Davis. Oh yeah? Then show me where the people are. I look up at him. What people? Davis waves the pages I've left on my tray so they flap in the air. These people, he says. I can see them, I can hear them, I know them, but they're not in this room. They're not on this block. They're not in this prison or this town or even this same world as you and me. They're in this other place. (Egan, 96)

In this passage of the novel, the writer Ray's cell mate is convinced that Ray's novel is a ghost story because of the “otherness” of the people he describes in his writing. If this definition of a ghost story was true, then every piece of fictional writing would be a ghost story, as most of them involve characters that are not situated in the same world with the readers. This is a very postmodern way to view literature in general, as this relates closely to Brian McHale's definition of the “trope of fiction”, which he introduces in his study on postmodern fiction. In his study, McHale states that the special logical status of the fictional text is its condition of being an in-between, amphibious –

neither true nor false, suspended between belief and disbelief (33).

McHale's definition of postmodern fiction is very close to the idea Ray's cell mate has on creative writing. The cell mate gives the following statement on why Ray's novel is indeed a ghost story, and this way ties the definition of postmodern fiction together with his own idea of every fictional story being a ghost story: "They [the people in Ray's story] are ghosts, brother, he says. Not alive, not dead. An in-between thing" (Egan, 96).

At this point, I will give a brief introduction to the main storyline of *The Keep*. The novel begins with the introduction of the protagonist Danny. He is a young man who has run into trouble with a gang of criminals in New York City, mostly because of his own lifestyle of trying to find easy money with as little work as possible. At the beginning of the novel, Danny's cousin Howie invites him to join him on his hotel-building project in a castle somewhere in Eastern Europe. The actual location of the castle is never revealed, and none of the protagonists of the novel seem to know where they really are, not even Howie who is the castle's new owner. The only description of the geographical location of the castle in the novel is that it may be located "in Austria, Germany or the Czech Republic" (Egan, 4). Danny hopes to find a way out of his troubles by literally travelling to the other side of the world to meet his cousin. He does this despite of his haunting history with Howie: Danny and his other cousins deliberately trapped Howie in underground caves when they were children.

The relationship between the two cousins has always been tumultuous and filled with different kinds of power plays and expectations. Danny had perceived young Howie as a "Dungeons and Dragons" nerd, but now Howie has grown into a charismatic man with money, family and followers, while Danny himself had his "peak" in high school, and has not achieved much since. The tension between the two cousins as well as the Gothic setting of the castle and its mysteries form one storyline in the novel. The mystery of the castle slowly begins to unravel, as the reader follows Danny into the depths of the Gothic castle and its history. In the past, the castle was

the home of a noble family, whose last surviving member still lives in the castle's keep – a high tower overlooking the whole building.

The future of the castle lies in the hands of Howie and his followers, as they seek to rebuild it as a sanctuary for modern people searching for peace and a place for soul-searching. There is some irony in the contrast between the violent history of the castle and its glorious future as a retreat for modern people looking for a break from their hectic life. The past of the castle is only revealed when the castle builders dig deeper into the history of the castle and come across the secrets that it holds in the hidden tunnels that are built underneath the building.

The storyline of the castle in itself would be quite a traditional narrative with a Gothic twist. However, besides the story of Danny and Howie, there is also another level of storytelling in the novel, as the storyline with the castle is actually written by another character, Ray, who is serving a life sentence in a prison somewhere in the United States. During his time in prison, Ray joins a creative writing class, where he writes the story of the Gothic castle, as well as falls desperately in love with the class teacher, Holly.

This other storyline suggests metafictionality, as it is of a writer writing a story inside the novel. This is a type of metafictionality that Patricia Waugh describes as follows: “metafiction may concern itself with particular conventions of the novel, to display the process of their construction” (4). In other words, through Ray's writing, the reader is reminded that the novel they are reading is indeed a work of fiction – or a work of fiction about writing fiction. In Waugh's terms, the novel then “overtly lays bare its condition of artifice” (4). This means that the novel does not conceal its “real self” in the way traditional literature does, but instead embraces the fact that it is indeed a piece of fiction and thus artificial. Linda Hutcheon has further analyzed the meaning of metafiction in a postmodern context, as according to her, a text may self-consciously present its own creative processes, perhaps as a model of man's exercise of language and meaning production (25).

The idea of metafiction, especially when regarding “fiction about fiction”, relates closely to

the theme of imprisonment and escape, as Ray is literally situated inside prison walls when he writes his story. It is with the help of his creative writing that he is able to escape the mundane and sometimes violent prison life.

The themes of imprisonment and escape are manifested in the novel both literally and in more abstract ways. There are physical places in the novel that prove to be impossible to escape from for the characters. Danny, for example, is not able to leave the village near the castle, even when he tries, as the physical reality of the place seems to be in a constant state of change. This instability becomes evident early on with the difficulty of defining the geographical location of the place. Maria Beville also states that "in fiction, the 'turbulent landscapes' are a central part of the generic substance of Gothic postmodernism, and of its representation of otherness" (15).

The instability of the place and the landscape of Gothic postmodern fiction therefore seem to be important features when regarding the genre in itself. As David Punter and Glennis Byron have stated the following about the essence of location in Gothic postmodernism:

What we find in the numerous conjunctions of Gothic and the postmodern is a certain sliding of location, a series of transfers and translocations from one place to another so that our sense of stability of the map is – as indeed it has been since the first fantasy of the Gothic castle – forever under siege, guaranteed to us only by manuscripts whose own provenance and completeness are deeply uncertain (Punter and Byron, quoted in Beville, 52).

The more abstract means of imprisonment and escape in the novel are presented through various mental and physical problems, as Holly, for example, struggles with her addiction to drugs. Howie has not been able to overcome his childhood traumas, and Danny has to come to terms with his feelings of guilt and existential crisis. This way, the mental imprisonment represented in the novel is as important as the actual physical places that function as prisons and traps for the characters.

I will begin this thesis with an introduction to the theory behind my analysis, which is Gothic postmodernism. I will begin chapter two with an introduction to Gothic fiction and literary tradition.

After that, I will move on to postmodern fiction. When these two separate literary styles are finally combined, Gothic postmodernism can be understood. Gothic postmodernism will function as the basis for my later analysis in this thesis, and will be introduced with more detail in the end of chapter 2.

Chapters 3 and 4 will be dedicated to the textual analysis of the novel. I will begin first by introducing the concepts of imprisonment and escape, which both are central themes in the novel. In chapter 4, I will expand this literary analysis to concern the broader issues of postmodern fears and anxieties.

## 2. Theory of Gothic Postmodernism

In this chapter, I will give the theoretical framework for my thesis. The main theoretical background for my study is Gothic postmodernism, and in this study it is treated as a literary genre of its own. Therefore, it will be useful to begin with a brief introduction to the literary genres of both Gothic fiction and postmodernism. After the definition of these two genres, the focus of the latter part of this chapter will be on what happens, when these two literary genres are combined and merged together; this hybrid of the genres is Gothic postmodernism. The literary theory behind Gothic postmodernism will function as the framework for my later analysis of Egan's novel *The Keep*.

In this chapter, I will also introduce some of the key concepts that are later discussed in this thesis. One of the most important concepts for my analysis will be the use of metafiction in *The Keep*, regarding how it is used to emphasize the Gothic postmodernity of the novel. Other issues I will introduce in the following chapter will be how both imprisonment and escape are presented in the novel as Gothic postmodern themes. Following this, I will move on to how modern fears and anxieties relate to the Gothic postmodernity of the novel. The actual analysis of the novel will be done through a close textual analysis.

As noted earlier, Gothic postmodernism as a literary genre has not yet been widely studied. Due to this lack of academic material on the subject, the main theoretical background for this thesis will be based on Maria Beville's study *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (2013), alongside with other studies that have noted the existence of this specific genre of literature. Some important theoretical background for both Gothic and postmodern fiction will also be introduced in this thesis. Finally, this thesis supports the claim that Gothic postmodernism is a genre of its own, and that Romantic Gothic, Victorian Gothic and Gothic postmodernism logically represent different genres (Beville, 17).

Gothic postmodernism can be seen as a combination of two different literary genres, Gothic and postmodern fiction. Even though the golden age of Gothic fiction was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and

postmodernism emerged much later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I hope to prove that when combined, these two seemingly very different literary genres can be seen to be strikingly similar, especially when regarding the thematic elements studied in this thesis.

In relation to this, Beville argues that “Because the genre [Gothic postmodernism] is bridging a gap of over two centuries it could mistakenly be seen as neo-gothicism or just postmodernism with some Gothic elements”. However, she sees it as a distinct literary movement and a genre in its own right (34). This is also in accordance with my own view of Gothic postmodernism, and the scope through which Egan's *The Keep* will be analyzed in this thesis.

The literary genre of Gothic fiction has its origins in 18th-century Britain, where it emerged with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which is regarded as the first “Gothic story with its feudal historical and architectural setting, deposed noble heir and ghostly supernatural machinations” (Botting, 14). After Walpole's novel, the genre “reached crescendo” in Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) (Lloyd-Smith, 3).

Gothic fiction has recurring features, textual elements and character types that distinguish it from other literary genres. Robert D. Hume has specified the elements that can almost always be found in traditional Gothic narratives: “These 'Gothic trappings' include haunted castles, supernatural occurrences (sometimes with natural explanations), secret panels and stairways, time-yellowed manuscripts, and poorly lighted midnight scenes” (282). To further explain the essence of Gothic fiction, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has given a following definition regarding the distinctive and recurring characteristics of the genre:

You know something about the novel's form; it is likely to be discontinuous and involute, perhaps incorporating tales-within-tales, changes of narrators, and such framing devices as found manuscripts or interpolated histories. You also know that whether with more or less relevance to the main plot, certain characteristic preoccupations will be aired. These include the priesthood and monastic institutions; sleeplike and deathlike states; subterranean spaces and live burial; doubles; the discovery of obscured family ties; affinities between narrative and pictorial art;

possibilities of incest; unnatural echoes or silences; unintelligible writings, and the unspeakable; garrulous retainers; the poisonous effects of guilt and shame [...] (262)

To clarify the conventions of traditional Gothic fiction even more, I refer to Teresa Goddu's study on American Gothic fiction, where she states that the most common and distinguishable features of Gothic fiction are haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madness, terror, suspense and horror (5). In order to perform a close reading of *The Keep*, it will be important to recognize the generic features in the scope of traditional Gothic fiction, as well as inside the genre of Gothic postmodernism, which combines traditional Gothic features with a postmodern literary structure and thematic.

I already referred to various Gothic settings in the above. Often the setting of a Gothic novel is a haunted castle or a mansion, and often the setting seems to function almost as a character of its own. Egan's novel *The Keep*, for example, includes an old castle, caves and a prison as the settings for the story. It is the setting of *The Keep* that gives the first hint towards the novel being related to the Gothic tradition. The gloomy castle and the evil baroness entrenched inside the tower create an unmistakably Gothic backdrop for the events taking place in the novel. The first few lines of the novel already set a specific tone to the story. This passage accentuates the Gothicity of the novel through its description of the setting in which the story will take place. The more hidden layer in this passage is the hint towards the importance of fiction and fictionality. These two themes will become important later in the novel, in the metafictionality that is represented through the other storyline happening in the prison, as this next passage from Egan's novel shows:

What he saw was solid as hell: two round towers with an arch between them and across that arch was an iron gate that looked like it hadn't moved in three hundred years or maybe ever. He'd never been to a castle before or even this part of the world, but something about it all was familiar to Danny. He seemed to remember the place from a long time ago, not like he'd been here exactly but from a dream or a book. (3)

In fact, the setting in Gothic literature is important in many ways. However, the discussion considering Gothic spaces as literary structures seems to have been somewhat narrow, as Manuel

Aguirre argues that traditionally Gothic buildings have engaged critics in discussions of sublimity, feudal values, patriarchal oppression or feminine issues, but the *physical* structure of home, castle or abbey has remained unattended (2). This is why in this thesis I wish to prove that the setting of the novel is one of the most important elements when considering its Gothic postmodernity and the themes of imprisonment and escape. In relation to this, Aguirre has stated that “it is easy to enter the Gothic castle, hard to come out” (6).

When considering *The Keep*, Aguirre's statement describes the setting of the novel very well. The instability of the physical setting becomes evident in the novel, as Danny finds out there is no way for him to escape the castle and the village. As I mentioned earlier, the physical state of the castle and the village seem to be in a constant state of change. The castle itself is also filled with different kinds of traps and secret passages, which make it easy to lose one's way inside the building and its surroundings.

In addition to the physical settings, we should also pay attention to narrative form, space and narration in Gothic fiction. Aguirre divides Gothic narrative forms into three different geometric metaphors: the Chinese-Box pattern – where the narrative is constructed as a series of stories-within-stories – a labyrinth form, and the form of the concentric quest. My main focus here will be on the Chinese-Box pattern, as it is the one that is used in *The Keep*, with its parallel storylines and the embedded story-within-a-story. This form functions both as a Gothic narrative form and as a “pre-postmodern device” (Aguirre, 5) related to the use of metafiction in the story, to which I will return with more depth in the next chapter

Thematic elements relating to fear and anxieties are evident, when considering the genre of Gothic fiction. This said, it could be argued that the fears of a certain time are often reflected in the fiction that is published during that specific time period. According to Elena Emandi, the 18th century witnessed a process of political, economic and social upheaval. In her words, “it's obvious that the Gothic is to be linked to the anxieties and fears regarding the crises and the changes of the

present rather than to the terrors of the past” (82). Therefore, Gothic fiction has always been a way to express the fears of certain time in writing, whether it be in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or today.

Keeping this in mind, Fred Botting has analyzed the essence of Gothic horror, and the way it has transformed itself during the course of its beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to this day:

Horror no longer lies in a barbaric, superstitious past, as it did for Radcliffe at the end of the eighteenth century; it no longer concerns the return of monstrously unavowable wishes as it did for Victor Frankenstein or James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*; it has nothing in common with the ghostly reappearance of the guilty family secrets and horrid paternal transgressions of the Victorians. Nor is it bound up with the primordial, atavistic or decadent energies embodied by Count Dracula. Nor does it lie in the callous sadism barely disguised by the nice veil of normality. If horror can be glimpsed anywhere, it occupies a site other than the surfaces of postmodern self-reflection (141).

This said, it is evident that Gothic fiction, when employed to represent modern fears, most often has to present itself in a form other than the traditional ghost story. Horror in Gothic postmodernism, and in this case especially in *The Keep*, thus must come from something other than the most traditional Gothic scares of haunting spirits and evil villains. It seems to be that it is not the physical place – the castle – that is haunted in the novel, but instead the hauntings arise from the characters' past.

In this thesis, I wish to analyze Egan's novel as concerning the fears and anxieties of the modern world by employing a characteristically Gothic form and thematic elements. The fears and anxieties in the novel are often more psychological than actual real-life threats, because the characters suffer from different kinds of addictions, childhood traumas and existential crises. These issues will be analyzed more in chapter 4, where I will focus on the postmodernity of the fears and anxieties represented in the novel. Unlike Botting's description of modern Gothic horror, *The Keep* does indeed borrow many of its elements of horror from early Gothic fictions, even though the fears of the characters are more typical for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This said, the novel is in a way a combination of the traditional and the modern – the Gothic and the postmodern.

Now, as I have given the basic theoretical background for traditional Gothic fiction, I will

move on to the other part of the genre of Gothic postmodernism. In the following part of my thesis, I will introduce the term literary postmodernism, and the features that are associated with that particular literary genre, as well as some historical background for the genre of postmodern fiction

If the literary features of Gothic fiction are somewhat easy to distinguish from those of other literary genres, it is more difficult to define what postmodernism in fiction actually is. Yet, as it is with Gothic fiction, there are many literary elements that can be classified as being typically postmodern. Robert L. Laughlin characterizes postmodern fiction as having some or all of the following literary elements: “double-coded language, or more popularly irony, self-referentiality, experiments in form and style, contingent truths manifested through multiple, dialogic narratives that work to subvert totalizing systems, and the breakdown of the autonomous, integrated individual” (Laughlin, 285).

According to Laughlin, “the postmodern fiction of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s made use of the above features to challenge the reader's expectations of how fiction could work, and more broadly, how the world could be known and how a person could situate herself in the world” (Laughlin, 285). Tim Woods adds that “[Postmodern fiction] is a mode that constantly problematizes the making of fiction and history” (Woods, 69). According to Woods, in addition to the often occurring re-writing of history and the problematization on how fiction is constructed, postmodernism as a genre tends to use and abuse, install but also subvert conventions through either irony or parody (70).

The self-awareness that is often employed in postmodern writing relates to the concept of metafiction, which, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, is “fiction about fiction” – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity (Hutcheon, 14). Thus, Beville argues that “postmodernism then questions not only the nature of existence and concepts of reality, but also takes up issues such as the fictionality and textuality of those realities” (46).

The self-reflexivity of Gothic postmodernism is an important feature when regarding this thesis and Egan's novel. According to Beville, "this implication of a newly or re-emerging self-awareness in literature is highly significant, as it can be easily argued that it is the concept of 'self' which ultimately drives narrative forward" (46). *The Keep* does not make an exception in the genre of Gothic postmodernism, as the novel does indeed reflect itself quite often in the storyline. The novel is constantly reminding the reader of its own fictionality, and this way the immersion of the reader is constantly disrupted. This way, the novel strives to break the "fourth" wall between the reader and itself.

Another key argument in the theory behind postmodernism was, according to Norbert Wiley, that the concept of "the self" was changing in some way, or as he puts it: "human nature was being transformed as a result of these sociocultural developments" (328). By these sociocultural developments, he refers to issues such as globalization, digitalization and a semiotic turn (328). Therefore, it could be argued that these important societal developments resulted in the idea of the self changing. Because of these changes happening in the society and in the minds of the people, the emergence of an entirely new kind of literary movement was inevitable.

There is also another role reserved for the idea of self-awareness in *The Keep*, as the main protagonists of the novel all have to come to terms with their own psychological issues and traumas. The castle as a setting seems to function as a catalyst for the soul-searching both Danny and Howie have to do during the course of the novel. In a more tangible way, the whole reason for the castle's existence in the novel seems to be that it has the power to somehow purify the minds of the people who go there. This kind of purification – the ultimate catharsis – takes place at the end of the novel, as Holly dives into the pool in the courtyard of the castle. This important scene also relates closely to the idea of being free, and thus will be analyzed with more detail later in this thesis.

When considering the literary genres that are analyzed in this thesis, the concept of 'self' is important, especially when regarding postmodernist fiction. McHale argues that "the shift from

modernism to postmodernism can be seen as a shift from epistemology to ontology, leading to a focus on the 'self', and thus to a strong trend of self-consciousness in fiction" (9). This way, the self-awareness and self-reflexivity I have referred to function as manifestations of this larger idea of "the self" becoming more and more important in the postmodern era.

Keeping this in mind, Beville argues that "selfhood in a postmodernist sense not only deals with the self that is the reader and the self that is the author, but also the 'self' that is the novel" (47). According to Beville, "this appears to be a point of conjunction between postmodernism and the Gothic, as devices such as the novel within a novel structure and distinctive textual self-consciousness have been used in many early Gothic narratives, from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Frankenstein*" (47). This way, the importance of self-reflexivity reaches beyond the narrative, and to the level of the postmodern novel taking an identity of its own.

In Egan's *The Keep*, it is the prisoner Ray who creates the novel inside the actual novel. At first he functions as an outside observer, who comments on the events that take place in his writing. Later, when it becomes evident that Ray in fact is one of the characters in his novel, reality and fiction merge together. Ray's remarks that take place throughout the storyline, contribute to the textual self-awareness of the novel, and function as devices that deliberately break the reader's immersion and stress the fact that the reader is reading a fictional text. The storyline of the novel therefore is what Brian McHale calls *ontological* – or posing questions about the nature and existence of reality (10).

The two parallel "worlds", or the separate realities of the prison and the castle that exist within the novel also resemble what McHale calls *heterocosm*, which means the otherness of the fictional world and its separation from the real world of experience. McHale argues that the separation does not mean that there is a relationship between the real and the fictional, as he states that "for the real world to be reflected in the mirror of literary mimesis, the imitation must be distinguishable from the imitated: the mirror of art must stand apart from and opposite to the nature

to be mirrored” (28).

In *The Keep*, the fictional world represented through Ray's writing is odd enough to be recognized as a work of an amateur writer. The fictional world of the novel still does mimic the real world, and at the end of the novel both storylines are tied together, as the writer and the main protagonist in his story finally meet in a dreamlike, hallucinatory passage.

One of the main postmodern features of the novel unarguably is its metafictionality. The novel consists of two parts, the story involving the prisoner Ray, and the story he is writing about the two cousins in the castle. As a literary device, metafiction is typically postmodern. Waugh has explained that ”*metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2).

In *The Keep*, it is easy for the reader to early on distinguish the fictionality of the storyline involving the castle. Later on it becomes evident that this storyline is the work of one of the characters in the story. The complex relationship between reality and fiction is present in the novel with the parallel storylines, which overlap and leave the reader questioning how much of what they have read was even “true”. The mystery slowly begins to unravel as the novel progresses, and as reality and imagination are merged together.

The use of metafiction adds an intriguing layer to the novel, which for the most part has fundamentally Gothic undertones. After all, the idea behind the use of metafiction in postmodern literature has been to erase the line between reality and fiction. One could argue that the Gothic genre of fiction has always been about losing oneself to the text, and at least in modern times, has often been regarded to be purely entertainment and “cheap thrills”. When this kind of combination of two genres is executed, it creates an interesting contradiction, which will be further discussed in the next subchapter about Gothic postmodernism. However, it has to be noted that although the use of metafiction is only one aspect of postmodernism, nearly all experimental contemporary writing

displays *some* explicitly metafictional strategies (Waugh, 22). Thus, it could also be argued that the postmodern features of the novel mean that it belongs to the continuum of modern fiction.

Maria Beville further clarifies what postmodernism is, as she argues that,

The strategies and devices of literary postmodernism challenge the possibilities of writing itself as well as the imaginative capabilities of its readers. As a mode of fiction, it rejects the concept of metanarrative in favour of metafiction, which includes multiple beginnings, endings and middles; forking and crossing paths, unresolvable plots, expanding metaphors, allegorical multi-functional characters, and most interestingly, the exhibition of playfulness in its relationship to its readers, and in also in its relationship to its authors.

According to Beville, "postmodernist fiction displays a tendency to employ metafiction as a vehicle for epistemological exploration, radicalising the modernist quest for self knowledge and consequently re-shaping the reader's approach to questions of ontology" (46).

In *The Keep*, metafictionality is created through the use of an external narrator – the prisoner Ray. His character could even be seen to echo traits of the traditional *Künstlerromans*. The definition of a *Künstlerroman* according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is "a class of *Bildungsroman*, or apprenticeship novel, that deals with the youth and development of an individual who becomes, or is on the threshold of becoming, a painter, musician, or poet". The main storyline in *The Keep* might be the story of Danny, Howie and the castle, but the second storyline of Ray coming to terms with his past by writing it down as a story, is as important when considering the novel as a Gothic postmodern novel of imprisonment and escaping. How Ray's storyline connects to the tradition of *Künstlerromans*, is how throughout the novel he finds his voice as a writer and as a human being.

When considering the postmodernity of *The Keep*, Ray's writing process moves the narrative forward, as he unravels the secrets of the Gothic castle with his writing. This is in accordance with postmodern fiction, where in Hutcheon's words, "the process of narration began to invade the fiction's content. Out of the *Bildungsroman* or *Entwicklungsroman*, then, came the *Künstlerroman* with its preoccupation with the growth of the artist" (11). It could be argued that the idea of growth is also important when considering Egan's novel, as it also functions as a coming-of-age story for

many of the characters. I will continue to analyze this idea of spiritual growth more in chapter 3 of this thesis, especially in relation to the ideas of imprisonment and escape.

In the beginning of the novel, Ray is an institutionalized prison inmate with little hopes of being anything more than that. In his writing lessons he realizes that through his writing he is able to mentally escape the prison. This is only the beginning of his liberation, as later in the novel he does perform an actual, physical prison escape. The personal growth of Ray's character is one important theme in the novel also when considering the ideas of imprisonment and escape. Therefore the ideas of mental and physical escapes will be further analyzed in chapter 3.

Now I would like to briefly return to the question of "the self", which has proved to be an important aspect of postmodern fiction. On top of Howie, Danny as a character has to endure a journey of personal growth as well. It could then be argued that the intended purpose of the castle seems to fill its function as a place for people to come and leave their emotional baggage. For Danny, this journey is anything but easy, as he has to face his inner demons to be able to come to terms with his past. As this is one key point of this thesis, I will get back to this with more detail in the final chapter, where I will discuss postmodern fears and anxieties.

To continue with the idea of connecting *The Keep* to the postmodern literary genre, the novel employs all of the "spatially defined tropes" Timothy Bewes has outlined as belonging to postmodern fiction. These tropes include such features as intertextuality, irony, double-coding, a text's simultaneous orientation towards a "sophisticated" and a "popular" audience, self-referentiality and metafiction (Bewes, 7). The way these tropes are used in *The Keep* clearly place the novel to the continuum of postmodern fiction. When regarding the postmodernity of *The Keep*, in addition to these literary tropes, it is also important to note the actual spaces and spatiality in the novel.

The main literary spaces in *The Keep* are the two different settings: the castle and the prison. In addition to these physical spaces, there are also more abstract spaces present in the novel. The

most obvious example of these abstract spaces is the metalevel created by the writer who is writing a story inside the novel. One space that is very important in the novel is the virtual space, where Danny spends most of his time. Danny seems to be completely attached to his portable wi-fi connection, and his world almost falls apart when he loses it. Danny's online life is self-created, but at the same time vulnerable and transient. Immediately after losing his wi-fi device, he loses a part of this world he has become addicted to. This said, the metalevel running throughout the novel and Danny's virtual world are two examples of the more abstract spaces a postmodern novel can create.

Danny lives in his virtual space through his mobile phone and wi-fi connection, and the sound of his phone connecting is enough to calm him down and make him feel like he is connected to the outside world. This connection is explained in the novel as follows: "He was hearing *something*. He was connected to *someone*" (Egan, 64). As he then loses his technological devices, he is forced to find a way of existing without phone calls, answering machine messages, and the constant stream of information available on the internet..

This passage of the novel shows how Danny loses his only access to the online world he has created for himself. For him, the need to be connected and the need to talk via his devices seems to be more of an obsession than something he needs to do in order to keep in touch with his friends and family. The way he needs this virtual reality is described in the novel as follows: "Danny wished he had brought his satellite dish to the top of this wall. He itched to make some calls – the need felt primal, like an urge to laugh, or sneeze or eat" (Egan, 6).

The addiction to technology and the internet seems to be a central part of Danny's existence and it seems to stem somewhere deep inside of him. It is not only that he as a character is a perfect embodiment of a modern man addicted to technology, but his need to be close to these devices seems to be almost inherent; it is as if he himself has become one with technology, as this next chapter from the novel shows:

Danny felt like shit, loose in the knees, sweaty, but also cold. And something else, too:

prickling. On his arms, the back of his neck, all the way over his scalp so he felt the hair lift up from his head. On the streets of New York, this prickling would make Danny perch on a stoop or lean against a wall and open up his laptop, because nine out of ten times – no, nineteen out of twenty, ninety-nine out of a hundred – wireless internet service was what he was picking up. (77)

Even if Danny himself needs modern technology and the internet in order to feel good, there is a strong element of fear and obsession in this relationship, also. Therefore, it could be argued that Danny's addiction to his technical devices can be seen to connect the novel to the Gothic fear of technological development. One thing that is also often connected with modern technology and people that are addicted to it, is their fear of missing out on something important if they are not available online all the time. It is such a common fear associated with millennials and young modern people in general that there is even a new word coined for this modern phenomenon: FoMo The Oxford English Dictionary defines this new word being "anxiety that an exciting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media". I would argue that this is one of the fears that the character of Danny embodies in the novel, even if in 2006 a word for this kind of postmodern fear was yet to be invented.

If I analyze the theme of postmodern fears even further, it could be argued that Danny's addiction to the internet also echoes the "age-old Gothic trope of the web" (Spooner, 2). Originally, the web as a literary trope meant an actual web, for example one weaved by a spider. However, it is an interesting idea to think how this Gothic web has transformed itself to mean something entirely different in this novel, but also at the same time being a similar kind of trap for the main protagonist.

Relating to the idea of postmodern fears being more abstract than those represented in Gothic fiction, one of the most important features of postmodernism derives from Jean Francois Lyotard's classic study on the postmodern condition, where he states that "[The role of postmodernism] is not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented" (Lyotard, 79). Beville has analyzed this and concludes that "negative representation" functions to assert that

any reality that might exist does so only in the realm of the imagination (Beville, 48). I will analyze this issue further in the following part of this thesis, specifically in the context of Gothic postmodernism.

I would argue that in *The Keep*, Egan clearly recognizes the generic history of both Gothic and postmodern fiction, and adopts the most typical features of both genres. This combination of the two genres gives her an opportunity to create a self-aware and self-reflexive environment, which at the same time is distinctively Gothic, and has something to say about the postmodern condition.

In relation to the self-awareness Egan is able to create in her novel, Hutcheon argues that narratorial self-consciousness often takes a form a parodic awareness of literary conventions (52), which in the case of *The Keep* obviously are the conventions of Gothic fiction. At this point it is important to note that despite of the self-awareness in the text, I would argue that Egan's novel does not function as a parody or a pastiche of the aforementioned literary genres, but instead, it can be seen as a manifestation of this new kind of literary genre, Gothic postmodernism.

To conclude, it could be argued that literary self-awareness is one of the key features of postmodern fiction, and an aspect that separates the genre from other literary genres. It also functions as a device for the reader to be able to identify a text as postmodern. Hutcheon does argue that “postmodernism” as a term is a very limiting label for such a broad contemporary phenomenon as metafiction (15). However, as for *The Keep*, I would argue that metafiction is used as a literary device to deliberately draw the reader's attention to the Gothic postmodernity of the text. The way the novel uses metafiction adds to the self-referentiality of the story, and creates an environment where the reader is constantly left questioning the relationship between the real world and the fictional world the novel represents.

One very important question, when regarding this thesis, is the question of whether Gothic fiction is still relevant in modern literary studies and the modern world in general. After all, it would be easy to dismiss Gothic fiction to be only about dark castles and mansions, ghosts, tormented

heroes and other elements that seem to be hopelessly out of date in today's world.

However, some credit must be given to the fact that the genre of Gothic fiction has existed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to this day. According to Beville, “many critics agree that the Gothic has endured the history of modern Western culture, primarily because its uncanny figures have consistently offered us a systematic process for determining but also disguising our hidden fears and repressed desires” (40). The aspect of fear, and how it can be represented through the scope of Gothic postmodernism, are issues that I will study further later in this thesis. At this point it is worthwhile to note that fear as a theme is very important when considering the relevance of Gothic fiction in the modern field of literary fiction.

When considering the typical features of Gothic fiction, Catherine Spooner notes that the Gothic has always been associated with the popular (1). This means that the main purpose of Gothic fiction beginning from the early days of the genre has mostly been to please the reading public. It also has to be noted that modern Gothic fiction often tends to merge with some other literary genre. Clive Bloom gives the following examples of popular 21st-century Gothic novels that all have elements borrowed from other literary genres: Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* novels (2005) and Charlaine Harris's *Sookie Stackhouse* series (2001) are a mixture of Gothic elements and romance stories aimed mainly for women, while the 2009 bestseller *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* combined violent horror and Regency gentility in a “mashup” or “recombination” spoof of both genres (Bloom, 187).

Therefore, it is evident that modern Gothic fiction is not always purely Gothic, but often a mixture of different literary genres. This is why *The Keep* in my opinion belongs to this continuum of modern Gothic fiction, with its postmodern elements and complex structure of overlapping storylines and different narrators. In this way, the genre of Gothic postmodernism can be seen to create something new and relevant by taking elements from different literary genres.

Elements of Gothic postmodernism have also been used in works of fiction outside the

literary scope, and these works might be useful when trying to define what Gothic postmodernism as a literary genre actually is. Beville gives some examples of movies that employ elements of Gothic postmodernism. She claims that one of the most highly acclaimed movie trilogy of all time, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*, is an example of Gothic postmodernist filmmaking, as well as the more obviously Gothic-inspired works of Tim Burton (59). These movies also combine elements from different genres, while keeping their overall atmosphere close to Gothic. These examples of Gothic postmodern filmmaking are similar to *The Keep*, as the Gothic postmodernity of each these works of art might not be obvious at first sight, but comes through from the nuances and thematic elements of each of these stories.

The relationship between the Gothic and the postmodern has been well defined in Arthur Redding's study, where he explicitly connects the Gothic with postmodern fiction. In the following extract, he quotes Allan Lloyd-Smith's essay "Gothic/Postmodernism", where Lloyd-Smith indicates the parallels between Gothic and postmodern sensibilities and styles and argues that

Both genres accentuate indeterminacy. Both undermine ontological and epistemological certainties, both are overly indulgent of surface and play on affects, both prefer archaic fantasies to historical rationalism, both can be comic, camp or burlesque, both are highly reflexive genres, and both not only indulge but positively delight in dread and paranoia (Redding, 3).

Beville describes in closer detail the traditional Gothic literary devices and themes, which are also used in the genre of Gothic postmodernism:

[...] the blurring of the borders that exist between the real and the fictional, which results in narrative self-consciousness and an interplay between the supernatural and the metafictional; a concern with the sublime effects of terror and the unrepresentable aspects of reality and subjectivity; specific Gothic thematic elements of haunting, *the doppelgänger*; and a dualistic philosophy of good and evil; an atmosphere of suspense and a counter-narrative function (Beville, 15).

All the above literary devices can be seen in *The Keep*, as the novel indeed blurs the lines between the real and the fictional, as well as hints towards the supernatural. The thematic elements that Beville mentions can also be seen in *The Keep*, as the novel combines Gothic and postmodern

thematic elements and uses them to portray the fears and anxieties of the different characters. To an extent, these fears are universal, and not dependent on place or time. However, some of these anxieties that will be further analyzed, are those that are often associated with the modern world. These are the fears that are treated as specifically postmodern in this thesis. According to Beville, some examples of these “postmodern terrors” are alienation, evanescence and death (59).

To continue with the idea of how the Gothic fears and anxieties could be applied to fit the modern world, Botting notes that the role of Gothic, too, has changed. According to him, “once exiled and outcast as figures of horror, deviancy and decadence, the monsters, ghosts and doubles of the Gothic tradition find themselves absorbed and recycled as common images of a contemporary condition that is itself shifting and uncertain” (17). I would argue that instead traditional monsters and hauntings, it is this feeling of uncertainty and volatility that creates the mood of Gothic postmodern fiction.

The problematic concept of the self as portrayed in postmodern fiction, as well as the virtual self-created world of the internet that is represented in the novel via the character of Danny, are both unstable as such, and thereby can be seen to parallel the traditional Gothic tropes of the maze, the trompe l'oeil or the optical illusion. I will continue to analyze these literary devices further in the analysis part of this thesis, but at this point it is important to note the existence of these tropes in relation to the genre, and the literary analysis that will be executed later in this thesis.

In the previous chapter, I introduced the idea of textual self-awareness in the scope of both Gothic fiction and the postmodern literary style. To analyze this idea of literary self-awareness further, when considering Gothic postmodernism, textual self-consciousness is one important point of conjunction between postmodern fiction and the Gothic (Beville, 47). The novel-within-a-novel-structure, which Tim Woods calls “referential frames within frames” or “the Russian Doll-effect” (Woods,63) can be found from classic Gothic texts such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stoker's *Dracula* (Beville, 47).

This idea is one to connect Gothic fiction to postmodern fiction, as both genres employ these kinds of literary structures, or what Waugh calls literary “frames”. According to her, “contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and it is impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins” (29). This again relates to the blurring of reality and fiction in Gothic postmodernism, as well as emphasizes the instability and the feeling of uneasiness often present in this literary genre.

In *The Keep*, textual self-consciousness is taken to the level of metafiction, as there is a writer inside the novel writing the story. The lines between what is actually 'real' and what is only the product of the writer's imagination are blurred to the extent that the reader is not able to ascertain what actually took place in the Gothic castle, and whether some or all of the events had actually happened to the writer himself. In this sense, the novel employs a postmodern literary device of the *trompe l'oeil*, which refers to the author deliberately misleading the reader into regarding an embedded, secondary world as the primary, diegetic world (McHale, 116). As McHale states, typically this kind of “mystification is followed by demystification, in which the true ontological status of the supposed 'reality' is revealed” (McHale, 116).

What McHale is describing here also takes place early on in the novel, when Ray reveals that he is the author of the story. In *The Keep*, the “demystification” is not as clear, as it at first lures the reader to regard the story of the castle as a work of fiction, but in the end suggests that at least some parts of Ray's story might have actually been true. It is left for the reader to decipher what events of the novel were real, and what were the product of Ray's imagination.

When analyzing textual self-consciousness in *The Keep* as a postmodern idea, the novel does hold on to the textual self-awareness throughout it. As stated earlier, the novel constantly keeps reminding the reader that they are, in fact, reading a work of fiction, instead of letting them immerse in the fictional world of the novel.

Continuing with the idea of Gothic postmodernism being a combination of different literary

styles, it could be argued that Gothic postmodernism uses literary elements from traditional Gothic fiction and combines them with postmodern elements to create an atmosphere that closely resembles and continues the tradition of Gothic fiction, but also in a way updates the genre to discuss modern fears and anxieties, as Egan does in *The Keep*. The setting of the novel borrows its elements from the Gothic, but the issues that the novel brings up are modern and relevant.

Beville has stated that some of the issues that are explored separately in Gothic and postmodernist fiction, are actually one and the same. According to her, some examples of these issues are: "crises of identity, fragmentation of the self, the darkness of the human psyche, and the philosophy of being and knowing" (53). All of these themes can also be seen in Egan's novel, thereby linking it closely to Gothic postmodernism.

We should pay attention to how Gothic postmodern fiction can be seen to express the fears and anxieties of the modern world. It is obvious that many human fears are inherent, and thus stay the same through the times. Due to the massive changes that have taken place in Western societies after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where Gothic fiction has its origins, it must be noted that some basic human fears have morphed into new kinds of anxieties. These new fears might not have as much to do with physical terror, but instead happen more in the minds of people, and on a more psychological level. Beville has analyzed this issue, as according to her, through the terror of Gothic postmodernist texts, we can question our own unconscious fears, beliefs and prejudices "not only in terms of the desire that instigates them, but also in terms of the repercussions for society in general" (Beville, 16).

I would thus argue that Gothic postmodernism seems to function more on the level of unconscious fears and traumas of the modern age. According to Botting, especially in American narratives, "Gothic shadows flicker among representations of cultural, familial, and individual fragmentation, in uncanny disruptions of the boundaries between inner being, social values, and concrete reality, and in modern forms of barbarity and monstrosity" (Botting, 156).

The feeling of fear can be sensed throughout *The Keep*, but instead of it gradually increasing and coming to a shocking finale as is typical in Gothic fiction, in *The Keep*, fear is always lurking somewhere in the background, or in the minds of the characters of the novel. Relating to this, Alex Link suggests that “what is at stake in the postmodern Gothic is not so much a landscape of uninterrupted, active danger, as the sense that anything in the landscape is a plausible phobic object available to Gothic narratives yet to be imagined” (72). This uncertainty is closely related to the idea of paranoia that is present in the novel, and strongly manifested in the protagonist, Danny.

When considering modern Gothic aesthetics and the novel's relationship to that, Danny as a character seems to function almost as an allusion to the modern Neo-Gothic movement, with his flamboyant, almost androgynous style consisting of black clothes, pointy boots and dark lipstick. He as a character manifests what Beville calls the “truly terrorised Gothic anti-hero” (35). In *The Keep*, Danny is the closest thing the novel has to a Gothic hero travelling to a dark castle and revealing its secrets. However, it is clear to see that there is not much heroism or bravery in him at all.

Danny's character is very similar to how Beville describes the main protagonist of another Gothic postmodern novel, Bret Easton Ellis' main character in *Lunar Park*. How this character is described is strikingly similar to Egan's Danny, and thematically Ellis's novel is closely connected to *The Keep*. Beville describes Ellis's protagonist as follows: “one might, subsequently, consider him as a typical Gothic-postmodernist anti-hero; trapped in a terrifying void of hyperreality and non-identity, induced by a cocktail of postmodern culture, prescribed and non-prescribed drugs, megalomania and repression” (173).

Beville also mentions the Gothic subculture in her study, as she claims that “the neo-gothicism of the 'Goth' movement is, in its most basic sense, a celebration of the dark recesses of the human psyche: sensuality, melancholia, morbid fascination, forbidden love, and the sublime aspects of pain and terror” (36). This said, in his Neo-Gothic flair, Danny is the embodiment of the

way Gothic subculture often represents itself in today's world. The way Danny the Neo-Goth finds himself in the middle of a Gothic setting is one example of the self-awareness and postmodernity of the novel. It could be argued that by drawing his look from the Gothic subculture, the character of Danny functions as a representation of how the Gothic is perceived in the modern society – black clothes, dark makeup and the brooding attitude towards life in general.

### 3. Imprisonment and Escape

Imprisonment in *The Keep* is a key element both at the narrative level of the novel, as well as an important thematic element. Escape as a theme is also important when considering the theme of imprisonment as the two could be seen to parallel each other – or function as polar opposites. Imprisonment as a theme is closely tied to Gothic fiction, as it is one recurring theme in the genre. In *New Companion to the Gothic*, Kate Ferguson Ellis has listed the “vast, imprisoning spaces that regularly appear in the Gothic to include castles, monasteries and actual prisons” (458). It is not a coincidence that two of these spaces function as settings in *The Keep*. As mentioned before, these physical spaces are not the only prisons that can be found in the novel, and in this chapter, I will analyze the issue of mental imprisonment further.

The definition for the word *escape* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “to get away from a place where you have been kept as a prisoner or not allowed to leave”. Thus, the word *escape* in itself is closely related to the idea of imprisonment. Prisons, both as narrative elements, and as thematic elements, are important parts of *The Keep*, as the novel introduces many types of prisons – the most obvious one being the actual institute inside of which Ray is serving his life sentence.

Therefore, possibly the most concrete form of imprisonment in the novel is manifested in the character of Ray, as he has to live his life inside an actual prison. He serves his sentence inside the prison walls, but is able to mentally escape through his writing in the prison's creative writing class, as the next passage from the novel explains:

“I'm here to show you a door you can open”. And she taps the top of her head. “It leads to wherever you want it to go”. The door wasn't real, there was no actual door, it was just *figurative language*. Meaning it was a word. A sound. *Door*. But I opened it up and walked out. (Egan, 19)

This is the first time the reader of the novel can see that there are parallel storylines in the novel; this is also the first time the metafictional level of the story begins to become evident for the reader.

It is only through his writing that Ray is able to find his own invisible door, which he can use as an access to the outside world. Later in the novel Ray does perform an actual escape, when he and his cell mate are able to get out of the prison. In this way, Ray as a character performs two types of escapes: mental and physical. The mental escape for him functions as a life-changing experience, as he is able to come to terms with himself and he is introduced to his own imagination and creativity.

The theme of imprisonment can also be tied to the literary settings often represented in Gothic fiction. In *The Keep*, alongside the aforementioned prison, the other main setting is the Gothic castle, inside of which the main events of the storyline take place. One important aspect of the spatiality in the novel is the castle, which seems to shift its shape in a way that traps the protagonist and makes him lose his direction completely. This again parallels the Gothic trope of the maze, where one can lose himself and might never find his way out.

Manuel Aguirre has analyzed a similar storyline in his study on Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797). In Radcliffe's story, the protagonist Ellena desperately tries to escape the convent she is trapped inside of, but finds out that – similarly to the castle in *The Keep* – the convent seems to be impossible to escape, due to its changing shape and different kinds of trappings. According to Aguirre, this “makes action seem futile and escape impossible, and seems associated with a vast inhuman power for obstruction and control” (10). The same could be applied to *The Keep*, as despite of his efforts, Danny is unable to leave the castle.

Justin Neuman calls these kinds of literary spaces “the Gothic tropes of unstable physical and temporal geography” (86). This means that the castle as a setting – as well as its surroundings – seem to be in a constant state of change. The buildings and their surroundings therefore are not the immobile physical structures they at first glance seem to be, but, instead, they deliberately try to trap the individual, this way making it impossible for them to find their way out.

The most evident case of unstable physical geography in the novel is the passage where Danny makes his first attempt to escape the castle and the village. In this passage he begins to

suspect that the whole village has gone through a metamorphosis, and it is not the same place he arrived to a couple of days earlier. In Danny's paranoid mind, this is all a set-up, a scene created by his cousin Howard: "And as soon as Danny had this thought, the fakeness of the town seemed obvious to the point of stupidity: the too-bright soda bottles on a vendor's cart. The flowers in boxes. The way everyone smiled. Danny stood up. Fear had its cold tongs on him again" (Egan, 163).

As can be seen above, the literary setting of *The Keep* functions as a trap for the protagonist Danny. Therefore, it could be argued that Danny's situation in the castle parallels Ray's prison experiences. Danny has volutarily travelled to the castle, but when he begins to question Howie's intentions, the physical instability of the place prevents him from leaving the place. After all, leaving has been Danny's special forte, as for his whole life he has been able to slide through difficult situations by escaping them, by simply leaving. This has been his survival strategy – avoiding the things he finds uncomfortable or things that could force him to think about his own failures.

The physical entrapment that is caused by the unstable geography and maze-like structure of the castle is only one of the ways imprisonment is presented in the novel. Relating to Danny's physical entrapment inside the castle, it could be argued that he is also trapped inside of his own mind. His mental entrapment in the novel becomes evident when the reader witnesses his existential crisis and the feelings of guilt he is trying to suppress. The impossibility of escaping also relates to the fear of losing control, which is one of Danny's most defining anxieties. This idea will be further discussed in the following chapter, in which I will analyze postmodern fears and anxieties and how they are represented in the novel.

When discussing mental problems, it is also important to note Howie, who still has to carry the burden of his childhood trauma – an event he has never been truly able to forget or forgive. In the novel, all the characters seem to be somehow dysfunctional, as in the other storyline, Ray has to

come to terms with his own past mistakes, which resulted in him having to spend the rest of his life in prison. Of course, there is also Holly who struggles with her past drug addiction and the haunting memory of losing her child because of her drug use.

One of the most obvious forms of entrapment is manifested via the character of the baroness, who has entrenched herself inside a tower – a place that is called the castle's keep. The significance of the tower is evident, as it is the element that gives the novel its title. The baroness is unable to let go of her pride and lost glory, and thus is doomed to stay inside the only place that is still left of the “good old days” of the castle's past. The character of the baroness can also be seen to fit into the continuum of traditional Gothic fiction, as she holds on to her noble heritage even though there is little prestige left for her in the modern world. This could be seen to parallel what Armitage calls the “pre-technological Gothic vision of good and evil in which issues of inheritance, the body and pure, and impure blood line supreme” (521, *New Companion to the Gothic*). The rest of the world has moved on from this ancient idea of nobility, but she refuses to admit that her noble blood does not mean anything to the modern people now inhabiting the castle. This way she is imprisoned inside her own history, holding on to being the last remaining member of their lineage.

Relating to the ideas of entrapment and being lost, different kinds of mazes and tunnels are also recurring elements in the novel. The reader is introduced to Howie's childhood trauma early on in the novel. This is also the first instance a tunnel appears in the storyline, as Danny and his friends push Howie inside an underground tunnel system and leave him there wandering for days. A similar kind of event reappears later in the novel, as all the characters involved in the storyline of the castle have to walk through a similar maze of tunnels. This is because the baroness locks the group inside underground tunnels that have been dug under the castle. This results in both Howie and Danny having to once again live through the traumatic memory that has haunted them both for years. The only difference is that this time they are in this situation together. In relation to the mazes and labyrinths often present in Gothic fiction, Morris has analyzed the concept of the “Gothic flight” in

his study. He argues that “branching corridors and circular passages transform forward movement into endless repetition” (307). This kind of repetition is used in *The Keep*, as the characters are forced to relive the haunting past experiences they have been trying to forget.

The tunnels and mazes that appear in the novel are closely related to the Gothic nature of the novel. According to Lucie Armitt, “the Gothic is an interiorizing form, claustrophobic in nature and inherently architectural” (513, *New Companion to the Gothic*). She argues that “it is the tension between claustrophobia and agoraphobia that provides the cracks through which the uncanny escapes, for as well as providing labyrinths and turrets” (513). In *The Keep*, it is the spaces that create the feeling of uneasiness and claustrophobia in the novel.

One distinctive feature in *The Keep* is how there are recurring and parallel events throughout the novel. David B. Morris has analyzed Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, where this similar kind of repetitiveness can be found. He claims that “like exaggeration, repetitiveness lends a strangeness to terror” (303). He claims that situations and events seem fated to generate exact or nearly exact facsimiles, which necessarily raise questions both about their own status and about the world in which such unlikely duplications occur (303). This kind of analysis could also be applied to *The Keep*, thus tying it to the Gothic tradition of duplications and events repeating themselves.

The theme of repetitiveness is also important when considering the genre of Gothic postmodernism, as repetitiveness is one of the defining features of postmodern fiction. This is once again one important literary device that connects Gothic fiction with postmodern fiction. Fliieger states that “the postmodern text is iterative, driven by the compulsion to repeat, obsessed with citation and recursive narrative” (89). In this way, it could be argued that Gothic fiction treats repetitiveness as a thematic, stylistic device through which terror and uncertainty can be created. Postmodernism then uses it to underline the fragmentation and strangeness that often define the literary genre. In Gothic postmodernism – and especially in *The Keep* – repetitiveness creates an atmosphere which echoes both literary genres.

In *The Keep*, one important aspect of repetitiveness comes from the fact that Howie has to relive his childhood trauma, now as a grown-up man. He has tried to distance himself from the past by trying to completely reinvent himself. His new confident self, however, begins to show some cracks as the group is trapped in the underground tunnels that run underneath the castle. This is when Howie loses his carefully constructed new self, and sinks back to the feelings that he had to live through as a child in a similar situation. In this passage of the novel, Howie seems to fall into a primitive feeling of absolute terror: "Danny! Don't do this to me, please. Please come back! Pl – ee – ee – ee – Big gasping sobs broke up his screams. Howard was crying like a little kid cries, his face slick with snot and tears. It was something no one should see" (Egan, 197).

This passage of the novel is a clear representation of Howie's trauma taking a hold of him. This is also an example of events repeating themselves, or what in Freud's terms are *involuntary repetitions* (Gordon, 31). This passage of the novel offers the reader a glimpse of the emotions Howie felt as a child being trapped and not finding his way out. In this passage, Howie seems to regress back to his childhood self and this way loses his calm and composed, newly created image. It seems that the more Howie tries to distance himself from the person he used to be as a child – and later as a troubled teenager – the more he is haunted by his past. It seems to be evident that at some point he is forced to come to terms with his suppressed memories. In relation to these haunting memories, Arthur Redding claims in his study on contemporary American Gothic fiction that "the more we murder the past, the more it returns to make good its claims, the more these absences and omissions themselves demand reparation" (37).

What finally happens in the present time – after the group finds their way out of the tunnels with Danny's help – is that Howie finally seems to be able to overcome his past trauma and forgive Danny. This is why the events taking place in this passage of the novel seem to function almost as a cathartic experience for Howie. Once again, he is able to perform an escape from the "prison" inside of him. This helps him to overcome his trauma and face the bad memories that have been with him

his whole life. After the experience, he is finally able to let go of the grudge he has been holding against his cousin Danny. Finally he seems to be able to let go of his past. As this following passage shows, it almost seems as if Howie's trauma has been something concrete inside of him, and after the experience he is also able to free himself of this “thing”. However, at the same time the “thing” has been one of his defining features through his whole life: ”Howard sat on the ground, leaning against the Medusa head spigot where Danny had seen the moving figures back when he was wiggling out. His elbows were on his knees, his head on his fists. Something had gone out of Howard. Maybe Howard had gone out of Howard” (Egan, 205).

To continue with the idea of freeing oneself from the past, it is important to once again look at the setting of the novel from this perspective. The reason behind the whole project of renovating the castle is Howie's vision to build a sanctuary for modern people in need of spiritual healing. In the following passage of the novel, Howie's wife Ann tries to explain the initial idea behind the castle to Danny:

A woman travels there by herself. She's unhappy, she's shut down. Maybe her marriage is in trouble; maybe she's alone. Whatever it is, she's become numb, dead to herself. So she checks in and leaves her stuff in her room and then she comes through the garden to this pool [...] and it *does* something to her. Being in that water does something: it wakes her up. And when she gets back out of the pool, she feels strong again. Like she's ready to start her life over (Egan, 47).

The pool is a very important thematic element in the novel, as events surrounding it keep recurring in the novel. It is implied early on in the novel that the pool as a setting will be important in the storyline. In the events that lead to little Howie's entrapment, Danny and his cousins first lure Howie to look into a pool, and then push him in. In his past, the pool functioned as a trap for little Howie. A complete opposite to this happens at the end of the novel, when Ann's premonition of the pool's healing powers is actualized, as Ray's teacher Holly travels to the castle and dives into the pool. It could be argued that the pool in the novel symbolizes both a trap, which results in Howie's lifelong trauma, but also a purifying, cathartic device, almost similar to the pool of life. This

duplication in the novel is contradictory, as the pool represented in the novel is both a device for entrapment and a passageway for freedom and release.

The pool of the castle has a haunting story behind it, as people tell the tale of the two twins who drowned in it a long time ago. This story itself parallels the haunting storylines of classic Gothic tales, and it adds a supernatural element to the story, as Danny goes through a hallucinatory sequence, and sees the twins as ghosts in the courtyard of the castle. In this tale, the pool had functioned as a trap for the children. In the novel, this Gothic ghost story becomes intertwined with modern people and their modern way of living.

For Howie, the purpose of the castle's pool is to provide an escape for people who would visit his hotel. In his mind, the pool would also function as a device through which they could release their imaginations which have suffered – or even imprisoned – because of the constant stream of entertainment modern people are exposed to every day. He claims in the novel that “You know how I think of this? The Imagination Pool. You dive in and – *bang* – your imagination is released: it's yours again, not Hollywood's, not the networks of Lifetime TV or *Vanity Fair* or whatever crap video game you're addicted to. *You* make it up, *you* tell the story, and then you're free. You can do anything you want” (47).

As it has become evident, both thematic and actual events keep repeating themselves throughout the novel. However, there is one thing that connects them all: they all seem to lead to an escape of some sort – some being figurative and some concrete.

In regards to the more figurative means of escape, the theme of imagination is another recurring element in the novel. Howie as a character is a perfect example of the power of imagination, as he is able to survive his days in the caves with the help of his own mind. In the novel, he states that “I escaped with my mind. I got out of there because I wasn't going to make it otherwise. I went into a game. Rooms in my head” (Egan, 206).

Ray as a character goes through a similar experience, as the reason for him to begin writing in

the first place is the way it makes him feel; he feels that through his writing he is able to mentally escape from the prison. The idea of escaping relates closely to the idea of being free. I would argue that the concept of freedom and what it means to be free are treated in *The Keep* as very postmodern themes. What makes the novel then Gothic postmodern is the way these themes are embedded in the story full of Gothic imagery and visual elements.

The feeling of freedom is treated as a very subjective experience in the novel, as being free for most of the characters means freeing themselves of a personal trauma or an addiction of some kind. In other words, the prison that they are escaping from is the one inside their own minds. This relates to the way postmodernism gravitates towards individualism and subjectivity. Beville calls this “a turning in on the 'self'” (46). When at the end of the novel, Ray says to Holly that “Don't you get it? You're free”, it is for the reader to decide in what sense and what this freedom actually means.

Imagination is one very important theme in the novel, and, relating to this, the idea of the supernatural world around us. The protagonists often yearn for earlier times, as they seem to think that people had more imagination back then. This next passage sums up the idea behind this yearning, as Howard tries to explain Danny the history behind the castle:

Think about medieval times, Danny, like when this castle was built. People were constantly seeing ghosts, having visions – they thought Christ was sitting with them at the dinner table, they thought angels and devils were flying around. We don't see those things anymore. Why? Was all that stuff happening before and then it stopped? Unlikely. Was everyone nuts in medieval times? Doubtful. But their imaginations were more active. Their inner lives were rich and weird (Egan, 44).

Here they are, two modern men living in a modern, secular society and surrounded by all kinds of activities and possibilities imaginable, and still they think that they have lost something that has been there before – their imagination. After all, their whole relationship has been about them using their imaginations, whether it is the role playing game they played together as children, or the way Howie had to use his imagination to be able to escape the caves. Many times in the novel the act of

escaping is executed through the use of imagination, therefore making the act of escaping a mental thing rather than something concrete.

A similar kind of sudden – and surprising – sense of freedom happens to Danny, when he accidentally loses his beloved satellite antenna that he uses to be able to get online. Danny is obsessed with technology, and it seems that his devices offer him a way of escaping his reality, and his haunting memories and feelings of inadequacy and failure: "Danny had advanced skills when it came to not thinking: he would picture himself deleting things, disconnecting them from his brain so they disappeared the way digital stuff disappears – without a memory. But sometimes he still felt them, the disappeared things, hanging around him like shadows" (Egan, 104).

Danny dropping his satellite dish in the pool seems to be the first step towards him finding some kind of freedom. His whole existence has been dependent on his online life, and even though he has not achieved a lot, the internet offers him the opportunity to be whatever he wants to be: "Danny had not much going on and no real prospects on the horizon, but what about all those prospects floating around maybe an inch or two *beyond* the horizon?" (Egan, 71).

This passage shows how being online is a promise of a greater future for Danny – the possibilities that could be right around the corner. In a way, Danny's whole existence seems to echo the postmodern ways of escaping reality. This is emphasized by the way the novel twists and turns and makes it almost impossible for the reader to know what is real and what is not. At first it seems to be clear that the storyline involving the cousins is a product of Ray's imagination. It is only later on that the reader finds out that Ray's story was actually something more than only a piece of creative writing. This is an example on how the novel stretches the boundaries between reality and fiction in a very postmodern way.

Relating to the idea of reality and fiction merging with each other, I would consider the following passage from the novel, where Howie confronts Danny of his addiction to his wi-fi connection:

What's real, Danny? Is reality TV real? Are confessions you read on the internet real? The words are real, *someone* wrote them, but beyond that the question doesn't even make sense. Who are you talking to on your cell phone? In the end you have no fucking idea. We're living in a supernatural world, Danny. We're surrounded by ghosts (Egan, 130).

I would like to emphasize here how the word *ghosts* is used in this passage, and throughout the novel as well. I will return to the idea of postmodern ghosts versus Gothic ghosts in the next chapter with more analysis, but to tie this passage of the novel with the idea of escape and being free, for Danny, freedom eventually seems to come from letting go of the satellite antenna that has kept him grounded and online. The moment when he drops it to the pool – the antenna slowly sinking to the bottom and Danny being unable to grasp it – functions as a turning point for him in the story.

It could be argued that escaping real life through the use of technology is a postmodern way of distancing oneself from the mundane reality, with its boring routines and problems. Relating to this, Brian McHale has analyzed postmodern means of escape; however, it must be noted that as McHale's study was written in the 1980s, it does not include the most recent form of escapism – the internet and social media. McHale argues the following about modern ways of escaping reality:

These “escapes” from the world of paramount reality range from mental strategies of ironic disengagement through hobbies, games, gambling, sex, holidays, mass-media entertainment, therapy, the use of alcohol and drugs, to the extreme of radical escapes such as religious conversion, Utopian alternative societies, and, ultimately, schizophrenia (38).

McHale sees these escape attempts as being “shuffling among worlds” (38). This means that our modern life involves different kinds of “worlds” through which people navigate in their everyday life. I would argue that in this way McHale's view of the postmodern world is similar to postmodern fiction with its many layers and dimensions created by devices such as metafiction.

McHale mentions drugs as one example of these postmodern means of escape in his study. Drugs are an important theme also in *The Keep*, since for many of the characters drug use has functioned as a form of escaping. In his teenage years, Howie resorted to drugs in order to forget his childhood trauma. His teenage years were a stark opposite to what kind of a person he was before

his entrapment. In the novel, the change in his character is described as follows: “after the *traumatic incident* his sweetness was gone and he got into drugs and eventually bought a gun and tried to rob a 7-Eleven” (Egan, 16). In this passage it is important to see how the word “traumatic incident” is written in italics. This emphasizes the way the adults in Howie's life tried to downplay the severity of the event, and the fact that Howie was almost killed by his own cousins.

Danny too has a background with illegal drugs, even though this is only briefly mentioned in the novel. His drug use is described to be recreational – something he has done together with his friends in New York. Holly's experiences function as a complete opposite to Danny's social drug use, as her addiction has been severe and because of this she has lost a lot. She still struggles with her addiction and the urge to use again. For her drug use has been a serious issue, as it is described in the novel as follows “but I thought happiness only came from getting high, and I was never doing that again, never, even if it meant not being happy one more day in my life” (Egan, 231). Therefore the novel portrays two very different viewpoints on drugs, as for Danny they are a way to relax and escape the everyday life, whereas for Holly, they have ruined her whole life.

Both for Danny and Holly, escaping means letting go of the things that hold them back from being free and facing who they really are, whether they be as literal as a satellite dish or drug addiction, or more abstract concepts such as memories and childhood traumas. In any case, escaping and finding freedom in the novel are highly subjective experiences. Especially for Danny, the time he spends in the castle seems to function almost as a rite of passage, as he is forced to abandon his previously aimless life in the city and come to terms with his past mistakes.

Aguirre has analyzed the concept of literary rites of passage in his study on Gothic spaces, and he quotes anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep's study of rites of passage on spatial movements, which involve “the individual's abandonment of the familiar world, the test or ordeal undergone in the 'liminal rites', and third, rites of incorporation to the familiar world” (2). This kind of structure is often used in Gothic fiction, and can also be seen in *The Keep*, albeit in the novel the structure is

more fragmented and not as straightforward as in Van Gennerp's analysis. *The Keep* portrays Danny's rite of passage, which begins with his journey to the castle and ends when the paranoia, *the worm*, finally takes a hold of him.

Beville states that “literary postmodernism expands to examine the self as alienated from the community and also from itself” (46). This postmodern sense of alienation is manifested in Danny, as he is a part of a community whenever he is able to be online or talk on the phone, but the minute the connection disappears, so does his circle of friends. When considering this, the people in Danny's life are only “ghosts” from some other dimension, and it is only possible for him to reach them via his technological devices. Relating to this idea, Lyotard has stated how in modern Gothic fiction “postmodern metanarratives fragment, boundaries collapse, systems of difference unravel. Ghosts become ordinary figures for the operations of new technologies and their hallucinatory, virtual effects” (Lyotard, quoted in Botting's *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*, 10).

One notable passage in the novel, which relates to modern technologies, is when Howard claims that “It [a mobile phone] could almost *be* your brain, you know? The machines are so small now, and using them is so easy – we're a half step away from telepathy” (Egan 128). This passage ties the novel to the supernatural tradition of Gothic fiction, as new phone technologies are compared with telepathy

. However, in this case ghosts are not actual terrors that appear at night, but instead creations of modern technology. Howard's statement could also be seen to mimic the fear of technology and its rapid development, where it is difficult for people to keep up with the newest inventions. Due to their nature, technology and science are also often featured in postmodern fictions.

Beville gives two examples of the kind of merging of the ghost and the electronic media device in her study, as she mentions the movies *The Ring* (Verbinski, 2002) and *White Noise* (Sax, 2002) (180). Both of these popular Hollywood movies feature technical devices that can be used to either communicate with ghosts, or as a “portal” for them to access this world. According to

Beville, “the advancement of technology in a postmodern culture that is pervaded by fear, therefore, can be recognized as posing new potential uncanny experiences and for the idea of the ghost in Gothic literature” (181). In *The Keep*, it is implied that the person on the other end of the telephone line or the internet connection is merely a ghost, someone whose true identity can never be truly known.

The fear of technology and science has been a recurring theme in Gothic fiction since its early days. However, the way this fear is represented in Gothic postmodernism is much more complex than for example in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where science contributed to the creation of the monster. I will continue analyzing the relationship between modern technologies and Gothic postmodernism in the next chapter, where this issue will also be analyzed in relation to postmodern fears and anxieties.

Previously in this thesis, I have analyzed imprisonment and escape mainly as abstract concepts, but it is clear that these issues are also treated very concretely in the novel. The main escape in *The Keep* is undoubtedly the prison escape executed by Ray and his cell mate Davis. They are able to escape the highly guarded prison by doing something that is almost impossible: “they dug their way down to the pipe, opened it up with a blowtorch, got inside, crawled under both perimeter fences, opened up another hole and dug their way back out” (Egan, 219).

In the chronological timeline of the novel, this prison escape takes place exactly at the same time as Danny, Howie and the group of workers in the castle are lost in the underground tunnels. The group in the castle perform a similar miracle as the prisoners do, as they are able to escape the tunnels that have been deemed unescapable. These two events of escaping can be seen to parallel each other and once again function as an example of the recurring themes in the novel.

In general, many of the recurring events in the novel begin with imprisonment and end with an act of escaping, whether it be physical as in these latest examples, or mental as in the previous examples that were about the characters freeing themselves of traumas and addictions. The novel begins with a journey where Danny has to find his way inside the castle, which at first seems to be

unbreachable. The ending of the novel, however, has to do with Holly's escape. At this point she finds her own cathartic experience of freedom in the pool of the same castle. Thus, the novel as a whole could be seen to begin with the idea imprisonment and end with the final act of escaping.

#### 4. Gothic Postmodern Fears and Anxieties

As it was stated in the previous chapters, Gothic postmodern fiction finds its atmosphere and many literary elements from traditional Gothic fiction, while the themes represented in Gothic postmodernism are connected to the modern day and age. This combination of postmodern thematic elements and Gothic stylistic devices is also present *The Keep*. In the previous chapter, I analyzed the recurring themes in the novel, which are escape and imprisonment. In this chapter, I wish to expand the ideas introduced in the previous chapters even further, and analyze the representation of Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties in the novel. In this chapter, I also wish to show how elements of fear and anxiety are linked with the ideas of imprisonment and escape – or how they overlap and are connected with one another in the novel.

The fears represented in the novel often stem from imprisonment of some kind. As it has been stated before, in the *The Keep* imprisonment is something more than only the physical sense of confinement. This said, I would argue that the ideas relating to the way imprisonment and escape are presented in the novel – and that were analyzed in the previous chapter – can be seen to echo the way postmodern fears and anxieties are portayed in *The Keep*. It could be argued that fear or different kinds of anxieties are behind many of the actions performed by the characters in the novel. This is the reason why the analysis of Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties in this thesis will also be performed through close character analysis.

The word *fear* in itself is closely related to Gothic fiction, as this genre often presents to readers a world full of ghosts and other supernatural manifestations, traps, gloomy castles and other similar elements of horror and terror. As previously mentioned, the literary genre of Gothic fiction has had to evolve in order to stay relevant, and this means that the elements of fear have also had to evolve alongside with the changing fears and anxieties of the reading public.

Clive Bloom notes this “historical change” in Gothic fiction, as he states that elements that scared our ancestors may or may not scare us. However, he argues that despite of this change,

horror fiction seems to retain archaic elements one would imagine should have been long since abandoned (211, *New Companion to the Gothic*). Therefore I would argue that there are some elements of horror that are universal and not dependent on place and time.

Relating to Bloom's argument, Fred Botting states in his study *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* that “Beyond transgression all the paraphernalia of Gothic modernity change: the uncanny is not where it used to be, nor are ghosts, doubles, monsters and vampires” (11). In other words, it could be argued that the terrors in Gothic postmodern fiction are an issue of supply and demand, similarly as it always has been; literature usually reflects the feelings and ideas of its own time. Relating to this, Beville claims that “according to many critics, Gothic novels answer a demand and meet with the needs and desires of their particular times” (99).

I also quote Beville here in terms of postmodern fears, as she claims that “while experiences of terror still carry the same intensity, the sources of terror in postmodern societies, are much more alarming. Indeed, metaphysical terrors now have a more profound resonance than the physical terrors of previous eras” (49). This idea should be kept in mind throughout this chapter of my thesis, as it has been said before, despite of the Gothic setting, postmodern terrors presented in *The Keep* are more terrors of the mind than actual physical threats.

Even though the fears of the modern age might differ from those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are also some important themes that have repeated themselves first in Gothic fiction, and later at the eve of postmodernism. Beville states that “Gothic terror and anxiety related to a rapidly changing world defined by violence, disorientation and the loss of meaning and faith, but these same kinds of fears re-emerged also at the dawn of 'postmodernity'” (Beville, 23). Therefore, I would argue that using Gothic elements while representing the more modern fears, a specific kind of atmosphere is created – and this atmosphere creates a perfect foundation for a genre such as Gothic postmodernism.

Botting has analyzed the Gothic manifestations of fear, and in his study, he states that

“Ghosts, phantasms, vampires, doubles proliferate, throwing up recycled shapes of haunted modernity, giving old form to new fears: in looking back, they leap forward to dress an uncertain future” (“Hypocrite Vampire”, 16). I would argue that in *The Keep*, this uncertainty is manifested through the instability of the landscape and the setting of the novel, which were analyzed in the previous chapter relating to the themes of imprisonment and escape. This continuous uncertainty is also represented in the ways the characters are trapped inside physical places and inside their own minds.

When analyzing the idea of fear in a more wide, cultural level, Beville argues that society today, in general, has what might be considered “a pool of common fears that are culturally specific, woven together by the subdued undercurrent of terrorism”. According to her, it is arguable that through the medium of the terror novel, we can potentially realize and expunge this stifling and pervasive fear (87). This way literature as a whole could be seen to be a medium through which we are able to address the anxieties caused by the constant stream of news we are exposed to every day.

Because of the ongoing threat of terrorism in the post 9/11 world, and the overall instability in global politics today, modern Gothic fiction and its representation of terror has often been seen to portray the collective fears and traumas of the modern world. Beville states that, “in this postmodern context of global terrorism, plagued as it is by spectrality and 'death', we seem to have an appropriate setting for this anticipated return of the Gothic from the periphery of literary discourse” (37). Therefore, in a world where international politics are in a constant state of instability, a genre such as Gothic postmodernism would be a perfect medium through which these issues could be represented.

Collective fears, and the way the fear of terrorism, for example, has been represented in literature, are issues that have been widely studied. That said, in this thesis my focus will not be on collective traumas. Instead, my focus will be on how different kinds of individual, postmodern fears are represented in the novel. This is because in Egan's novel, fears and anxieties are above all

postmodern concepts and above all very subjective; all the different characters in the novel have their own fears and traumas to overcome. The feeling of fear functions as a common and recurring theme in the novel, since the defining feature in all the characters seems to be that they are fearing something – the fear being a thing that binds them down and prevents them from doing what they want to do. Therefore, it could be argued that in the novel, the feeling of fear is shared in the way that everyone feels it. It is the way fear is manifested through the actions of the different characters that makes it fundamentally a personal experience. Even if the fears of the characters ultimately generate from similar circumstances, it is the way the characters address these fears that makes them such unique and subjective experiences.

In this thesis, I will analyze Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties through close textual analysis. As I have stated before, all the characters in the novel have one definitive weakness – they all seem to have one specific fear that keeps them from being able to set themselves free. This imprisonment is often a mental state for the characters, but as I already mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many instances in the novel, when the characters are physically trapped and unable to find their way out.

The baroness as one important character seems to be trapped both mentally and physically, as due to her old age, she is unable to get out of the tower she has locked herself into. In this way she has herself created her own prison inside the tower of the castle. In addition to this, she also feels that as she is the last descendant of her noble family, leaving her tower would be the last thing standing in the way of Howie claiming the whole castle to be his. She states that, “I will never leave this place. I am this place. I am every person who has lived here for nine hundred years. It's beyond ownership. It simply is” (Egan, 84). Her fear is that if she leaves her home, she will at the same time abandon the whole history of the castle and the memory of what it once was. In addition to this, her statement seems to imply that she and the castle's keep are somehow “one”. It is as if the keep is not only a physical place but somehow an extension of her character – a building that has morphed into

something that is almost alive in itself. This idea is very much related to Gothic fiction and the Gothic settings, such as the haunted Gothic castle, which function almost like characters of their own. These traditionally Gothic settings are sinister in their outlook, but the evil in them often can be found from beneath their surface. In the more traditional narratives, these settings often change shape and function as traps that lure in the Gothic heroes.

The baroness also seems to be a manifestation of one very important postmodern fear – the fear of aging. In the modern society, youth is highly valued, and it is important to try to look as youthful as possible, for as long as possible. Charles Howarth has studied the theme of ageing and the fears it evokes in modern people as follows: “the future but ultimately unavoidable threat ageing, perhaps only vaguely understood and all the more troubling for it, penetrates the present, creating fear” (237). In this way, the fear of ageing ultimately is the realization on how everyone will eventually grow old. For Howarth, the fear of ageing therefore seems to be more of a representation of the fear of vulnerability – the fear of not being young and invincible forever.

In one of the most striking passages of *The Keep*, Danny is visiting the baroness in her tower. After drinking some wine, Danny begins to see the baroness as a beautiful young lady, despite of the fact that he knows that in reality she is very old. When Danny sees the baroness from afar, she looks young and beautiful, but as she approaches him, she slowly starts to age. This process is described in the novel in a vivid way, and the reader can easily imagine the horror of seeing someone age in such rapid speed: “With every step Danny took, the lady aged – her blond hair whitened out and her skin kind of liquefied and the dress paunched and drooped like a time-lapse picture of a flower dying” (Egan, 80).

This passage of the novel seems to function almost as an allusion to another Gothic classic, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). In Wilde's novel, Dorian is a young man who trades his soul for eternal youth. He remains physically young and beautiful while his portrait grows ugly and old (Williams, 26). The way the baroness ages as she approaches Danny has a similar

sense of “shock value” as in *Dorian Gray*, when the portrait's decay is revealed and gradually the picture becomes more and more disgusting:

Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become hollow or flaccid. Yellow crow's feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its brightness, the mouth would gape or droop, would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men are. There would be wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands, the twisted body that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood (98).

Beville also mentions Wilde's *Dorian Gray* in her study on Gothic postmodernism. She argues that the character of Dorian Gray presents a self that “is horrifying and monstrous in its disunity, a self that in essence cannot openly exist within the conventional moral structures of society” (65). The baroness as a character is similar in a way that she has not been able to adapt herself into the modern society, and instead has entrenched herself inside the tower, where she can hold on to her memories and the feeling of being of more noble than others around her.

The reason I decided to bring up Wilde's novel here is because it is one of the classic Gothic novels, and it has similar thematic elements as *The Keep*, especially when considering the theme of ageing. In both of these novels, aging as a theme is represented through horrific descriptions of a person aging rapidly. Of course, the Gothic setting is also very important in both of these novels. The passage in *The Keep*, where Danny slowly starts to see the baroness age as she approaches him, has an element of supernaturalism which then creates a feeling of uneasiness and doubt of whether this is actually happening to her, or if Danny is hallucinating it all.

The baroness as a character resembles two different, classic Gothic character types. She comes across as an evil villain, when she tries to trap the hotel builders into the underground maze and laughs manically as they beg for her to let them out. This side of the baroness echoes the Gothic trope of the “evil master of the house”. One notable fact in this is how this character type in traditional Gothic fiction is almost always male. As well as being the evil villain, the baroness also functions as Danny's seductress, as after drinking her wine, he hallucinates her metamorphosis from

an old woman into a young and beautiful girl after which they have sex.

To continue with the idea of metamorphosis and transformations, another element relating to these issues in the novel comes from Danny's self-proclaimed ability to adapt to every situation. This is his special skill – his survival technique in life has been his capability of finding his way out of different uncomfortable situations. His adaptability also manifests itself in a more concrete way in the novel, as this next passage shows:

He jammed his head inside to see if it would fit and it did, with just a little room to spare that was barely enough for his shoulders, the widest part of him, which he turned and slid through like he was sticking a key in a lock. The rest of him was easy. Your average adult male would've needed a shrinking pill to get through this hole, but Danny had a certain kind of body – he was tall but also bendable, adjustable, you could roll him up like a stick of gum and then unroll him. Which is what happened now: he unraveled himself in a sweaty heap on a damp stone floor (Egan, 10).

In addition to Danny being physically more flexible than average, this passage can also be seen to symbolize Danny's uncertain, constantly changing self. Danny as a person seems to be in a state of continuous change, paralleling the instability of the settings represented in the novel. When this passage of the novel is analyzed in a more literal way, it could be seen to parallel Gothic fiction, with its uncanny descriptions of deformations and twisted bodies, as the reader of the novel can imagine how Danny's body twists and turns and is forced to take almost impossible positions in order for him to fit through the hole.

If I take this analysis even further in terms of Gothic postmodernism, the way Danny's body and his character are described could symbolize the idea of the postmodern fragmented self, and also on the other hand, the Gothic body of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. Kelly Hurley has described the idea of the Gothic body as follows: "The *fin-de-siècle* Gothic offers the spectacle of a body metamorphic and undifferentiated; in place of the possibility of human transcendence, the prospect of an existence circumscribed within the realities of gross corporeality; in place of a unitary and securely bounded human subjectivity, one that is both fragmented and permeable" (3).

Danny's adaptable and changing body is once again an example of the themes and elements introduced in Egan's novel that could be seen both as belonging to the Gothic tradition, as well as to postmodern fiction. In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic fiction, it was the revolution in the scientific theory and evolutionary biology that sparked the exploration of the human body also in the literary world. In the postmodern world, the human body functions more as a device for performance and self-actualization in the way people try to reverse the effects of ageing and make their body as youthful and strong as possible.

I would argue that Danny's identity is unstable and he is prone to morph himself both in the psychological and in the bodily sense. He has been able to adapt to different situations all his life by sensing the feelings and power plays between the people around him. This ability has been his only skill and has helped him survive some very difficult situations. This way *The Keep* as a Gothic postmodern novel combines the Gothic idea of “the human as abhuman, as bodily ambiguated or otherwise discontinuous in identity” (Hurley, 5), and the postmodern instability of the “self”. Danny as a character then functions as what Beville calls “the self-questioning realm of non-identity that is the locus of the Gothic postmodernist protagonist” (56).

The instability of the characters in the novel ties in with the idea of new technologies as Gothic postmodern concepts. As mentioned in the previous chapter, technological devices function as means of escape in the novel, but at the same time they also have a more sinister effect, as they seem to alienate people from each other. On top of the characters themselves being unstable, their relationships also seem to be tenuous and dependent on these devices that allow them to have some kind of connection to each other.

I would argue that modern technology is one issue that is closely related to Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties in the novel. In *The Keep*, Danny's whole life seems to depend on his internet access. The voices of the people he is able to hear with the help of his satellite dish at the beginning of his journey are the one thing that keep him sane. Later, as his journey progresses,

he begins to feel that the people once close to him suddenly are completely foreign. The people on the other end of the telephone line themselves are not familiar with this new Danny. At the end of the novel, he calls his girlfriend but she does not believe that the person calling her is Danny. It is as if he has become a completely different person during his stay in the castle. The people Danny thinks he knows are now only the 'ghosts' of people he once knew, and the people he used to know do not know him anymore

In this way, the ghosts represented in *The Keep* are not the usual spirits and hauntings that are present in Gothic fiction, but instead they resemble the memories and ideas the protagonists of the novel have of actual people. It could be argued that the novel presents the terrors and ghosts as internalized subjects instead of something that is found from the outside of the sphere of normality. According to Beville, "this internalization of supernatural and abject forces can be seen to have its roots in the fin de siècle Gothic fiction, with the emergence of Darwinian theories and the effects of psychoanalysis" (62). But in *The Keep*, these internalized terrors are taken further and presented via the scope of postmodernism.

When considering the terrors coming from within and being transmitted via modern technologies, Botting has analyzed the modern technologies in the Gothic postmodern context in his book *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*, as follows, "unlike the more familiar 'invasion', through which bodies or minds are taken over by external, alien or supernatural forces, pervasion describes a more thoroughgoing dislocation of spatial, physical and fantasmatic coordinates. Embodied and bounded experience, it seems, fades in the face of technical mediations that manifest their own ghostly force" (Botting, 10).

Modern technology in *The Keep* indeed seems to be a binding force. Only after Danny finally drops his satellite dish into the bottomless pool – which again has an important role in this passage – is he finally able to truly free himself. The theme of modern technologies cannot be dismissed when analyzing *The Keep*, as different types of technological devices appear regularly in the novel.

One key line in the novel regarding technology appears in the part where Danny for the first time actually begins to regret his trip to the castle. This is when Howard claims that the hotel will be all about silence: "no TV's – that's a given. And more and more I'm thinking, no phones" (Egan, 44). This makes Danny nervous, because suddenly he is missing all the devices that usually help him escape his own everyday life. It is as if he fears that when he loses the possibility to use these devices, he will have to face the thoughts inside his own mind.

As I have stated before, new inventions and the fear surrounding them, has always been one key theme in Gothic fiction. Botting has analyzed this fear as follows: "technoscience moves beyond human control, no longer guaranteeing enlightened progress, a cause of terror and horror, harbinger of barbarism and degeneration. From Frankenstein onwards, it seems, scientific discovery is as much threat as promise" (86) .

Thomas Vargish has studied how the fear of technology is portrayed in one of the most famous Gothic novels, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. He claims that "technological developments have a way of intersecting or ambushing the traditional values or at least radically altering the contexts in which they operate" (323). If this idea is applied to *The Keep*, it could be argued that Howard embodies the traditional family values, while Danny is the arrogant "big city boy" with his eccentric flair and addiction to technology. Vargish argues that the novels and films he lists in his study, that have to do with this specific fear, all deal with the same subject: "what it means to be a human" (325). This is a question that also relates to postmodernism and the postmodern existential anxieties that have been discussed in this thesis.

Danny as a character is an embodiment of a modern man, who has been living a hedonistic life in the city. The only disturbances in his easy life are his memories of betraying Howie. He wishes that erasing these memories was as easy as it is for him to otherwise live his life through his technological devices. As this following passage of the novel shows, he has not succeeded in this, as he constantly fears that he has to face these memories: "Danny had advanced skills when it came to

not thinking: he would picture himself deleting things, disconnecting them from his brain so they disappeared the way digital stuff disappears – without a memory. But sometimes he still felt them, the disappeared things, hanging around him like shadows” (Egan, 104).

Danny's relationship to technology does change significantly through the course of the novel. With the help of his satellite dish, Danny is always present, always within the reach of his wireless connection. In the beginning of the novel, his device functions as his lifeline – his most prized possession. However, as his journey in the castle progresses, he slowly seems to forget his old life. This technology that once functioned as his best friend, or almost as one of his vital organs, has now transformed into something completely strange. Even the people at the other end of the telephone line no longer seem to be the same people he once knew; it is as if they are imposters of some kind. This alienation between Danny and his friends also seems to work the other way round: the longer Danny stays in the castle, the more foreign he seems to be to the people at the other end of his telephone line.

This alienation between people is related closely to the idea of the characters in the novel being ghosts to one another. This idea is discussed in the novel's parallel storyline in a metafictional way, as the writer Ray's prison mate tries to imply that the story Ray is writing about the castle and its inhabitants is actually a ghost story. Ray answers to this by stating that, “ghost story? The fuck are you talking about? There are no ghosts in this story”. To which the other prisoner replies, “They're ghosts. Not alive, not dead. An in-between thing” (Egan 96).

This is why I would argue that the novel can be seen to parallel Gothic ghost stories, even though Ray, the fictional author of the novel, disagrees. The setting and the storyline of the novel do have many similarities with the Gothic tradition and Gothic ghost stories, which according to Punter, “commonly provide an alternative structure of cause and effect, in which the supernatural is not explained away but offers its own pseudo-explanation according to some kind of spiritual law of action and reaction: an unburied corpse, a murder victim or some other secret apparently buried

safely into past returns to haunt the perpetrator” (177).

When analyzing *The Keep*, there are also other kinds of ghosts in the story. These hauntings are the fears and traumas the characters have tried to suppress and forget. For Howie, this means that when he meets Danny after many years, he is reminded of his one worst memory of being locked inside underground tunnels and unable to find his way out.

For Holly, being with Ray in the prison brings back her own memories of when she was addicted to drugs. When considering this, the concept of fear also relates to Gothic postmodernism being a genre that concerns the “self”, as the haunting of the characters in the novel comes from within – or inside of them – rather than being something on the outside that scares them. This effect can also be seen in Gothic fiction, as Jerrold E. Hogle argues that, “the most multifarious, inconsistent, and conflicted aspects of our beings are 'thrown off' onto seemingly repulsive monsters or ghosts that both obscure and reveal this 'otherness' from our preferred selves that actually exists very much *within* ourselves” (498, *New Companion to the Gothic*).

This idea of ghosts and hauntings being internal and existing only in the minds of the characters is closely related to the way I analyze the Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties as subjective issues in this thesis. I have already brought up the anxieties and traumas of the two main characters, Danny and Howie. Therefore, I will now move on to the other characters and their own personal anxieties, as I find that they are also worth analyzing and strongly linked to Gothic postmodernism, which is the scope through which this thesis is written.

I have already mentioned how Danny is able to find some kind of personal freedom when he drops his satellite dish in the pool of the castle. Another character in the novel with a similar experience is Holly, who also finds her spiritual release in the castle. She has suffered from serious drug addiction and is now a recovering addict, who lives in a constant fear of relapsing. Similarly to Howie, she also has one memory that haunts her; her son was born prematurely due to her heavy drug use, and thus did not survive. She is now a mother to two little girls, but she still suffers from

enormous guilt because of her past mistakes.

At the very end of the novel, Holly dives into the pool situated in the courtyard of the castle. For Holly, diving into the pool functions as a cleansing, almost as a spiritual experience. This need for spiritual healing is the reason for the existence of the castle in the first place; Howie and his team want it to be a place for busy modern people to be able to come and find spiritual peace and free themselves of their thoughts and fears. Howie describes the meaning of the castle in the novel as follows, “The whole mission of this hotel we're putting together is to help people shed the real/unreal binary that's become so meaningless now, with telecommunications yada yada” (Egan, 188). This statement is interesting, as the way Howie describes the purpose of the castle seems to be almost ironic – it is as if he himself does not truly believe in what they are trying to achieve with their building project. This kind of irony with the way modern people try to fight their inner demons and try to find peace by travelling to the other side of the world, is very much related to the postmodernism in the novel.

The concept of spiritual healing relates to Gothic postmodern fears, as all the characters of the novel seem to be in need of this kind of recovery. Therefore, it could be argued that the fears of the characters in the novel exist on a very personal level. The ways the characters overcome their fears in the novel borderline those that can be found in modern self-help books: love for Ray, forgiveness for Howie and self-knowledge for Holly. The subjectivity of the fears and the way they haunt the characters in a psychological level could also be seen to be related to narcissism, which could be seen to echo the self-centeredness, or, again, the “turning in on the 'self'” (Beville, 46) often present in postmodern fiction.

When analyzing Gothic postmodernism, Beville argues that one reason for the survival of the Gothic in the twentieth century is that it has been able to evoke a “new sense of spirituality in an increasingly secular age” (200). For Beville, this spirituality functions as a counterforce to the consumerism and materialism that define life in the modern world. Howie articulates this idea in the

novel, as he talks about the people in the medieval times who were “constantly seeing ghosts and thought that angels and devils were flying around” (Egan, 44). Considering this, although generalized, Gothic postmodern literature in itself can function as a means of escape for the modern reader who wants to immerse in a world where anything can happen. In Egan's novel, it is clear to see that it is in itself a commentary on the essence of literature as a mean of escaping and using one's imagination.

This also draws a parallel between Gothic and postmodern fiction, as Beville argues that “narcissistic acquiescence to the concept of individual artistic genius and imaginative spirit is all too often the foundation of the postmodernist text, as it is, similarly of Gothic literature” (47). The characters in *The Keep* do all find their release and freedom in their own imagination, whether it be by writing a story, or by escaping a difficult situation by imagining it being a game.

At this point, I will briefly return to the idea of postmodern spirituality and how it is represented in the novel. I would argue that spirituality in the way it is shown in *The Keep* is not a religious experience, but it is more about the spirituality that can be found from within oneself. It is this new kind of “religion” that the protagonists of the novel are trying to find. This, once again, is an example of the text's postmodern features with its focus on the self and the protagonists' quest of trying to find meaning for their lives. This also ties in with the postmodern view on religion Victoria S. Harrison presents in her essay. She argues that “individuals who wish to be religious must choose from the various religious ideas floating around within the general culture, and put together their own idiosyncratic package, thereby constructing their own unique faith and lifestyle” (965). This way, religion in the postmodern sense is not a clear concept with strict rules, but something more fragmented and consisting of various ideas one can choose and combine. Today, it is not at all uncommon for a person to recognize herself as a Christian, but at the same time practise spirituality that can be found from Oriental belief systems for example.

The quest for trying to find inner peace and one's true self closely relate to this need for

spirituality and religious experiences. When considering this, Beville mentions in her study the concept of “the loss of self” being one of the key themes of Gothic postmodernism and the terrors that haunt our postmodern age (201). She argues that in the postmodern world, “existence meant guilt; transience; evanescence and heterogenous identity; fragmentation, and the deconstruction of individual cultural moral standards” (130).

In *The Keep*, the idea of the self truly is fragmented and fickle. One clear example of this is the fact that the true identity of some of the characters remains arguable throughout the story. For a long time it remains unclear whether Ray the prisoner actually is Mick in the parallel storyline. Also, even though at first it is implied that the castle is a fictional place, at the end of the story it is revealed that the castle actually exists in real life, as Holly travels there hoping she will find Ray. Therefore, Ray has not been writing fiction, but actually reciting “true” events from his past. This way reality and fiction become intertwined in the novel, emphasizing the postmodernity of the text and blurring the line between reality and fiction.

In the novel, Danny constantly doubts whether the “new-Howie” is the same person he knew as a child. Howie has been able to redefine himself and his new identity only shows cracks when he is subjected to the pressure of having to relive his childhood trauma. How this new Howie acts and talks – and even looks like – is completely foreign to Danny. The new Howie is a complete contradiction to the idea Danny has had of Howie – to him, he has always been a lost little boy; “a Dungeons and Dragons nerd”. This idea, however, is only based on the Howie he knew as a young boy.

The postmodern self in this way can be seen as a fragmented concept. According to Norbert Wiley, it is mainly the social identities that are getting more splintered. By social identities he refers to for example, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and marital status, as these have become more and more difficult to define for the postmodern person, who possibly does not even want to be defined through these concepts anymore (328). *Fragmentation* then seems to be a key word when defining

the postmodern identity, and the way people see themselves. The multidimensionality of the human psyche and the various different ways of human behaviour foreground the way the characters in *The Keep* can also be analyzed through the postmodern scope.

Danny's confusion with the “new-Howie” is understandable, as Howard indeed consciously has created a new persona for himself in order to be able to separate himself from the traumatized little boy he once was. This new image he has created would be perfect, if it was not for the childhood trauma that still haunts him. What in Gothic fiction would be manifested as the Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde-type of double, or *doppelgänger*, in postmodern Gothic it is the self-created personalities of the characters that function as this kind of fragmented self. Both Danny and Howie manifest these “fake” personalities, as they are both pretending to be something they are not. Also, for both of them, this is a survival strategy and a way to escape their own personal demons and hauntings.

This idea can be analyzed with the help of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein and his creature can be interpreted as symbolic doubles (Markley, 16), while in *The Keep*, the “monster” can be found within the characters themselves, and they are desperately trying to hide its existence. Danny even has a specific word for his own inner monster, as he calls it “the worm”. For him, “the worm” consists of the feelings of guilt and self-consciousness. These are the two feelings he has been tried to avoid all his life: “[...]the *worm* was three-dimensional: it crawled inside a person and started to eat until everything collapsed, their whole lives, and they ended up getting strung out or going back home to their folks or being admitted to Bellevue or, in the case of one girl they all knew, jumping off the Manhattan Bridge” (Egan, 10).

At this point I will move on to the idea of the human unconscious and the way it could be seen to manifest itself in the novel, David B. Morris has analyzed the concept of the Freudian uncanny in Gothic fiction as follows: “like the double, the uncanny achieves its strange and disquieting power by confronting us with a part of ourselves which we have denied and disowned, but which we can

never entirely expunge or escape (307). In *The Keep*, the uncanny for Danny has a name, “the worm”, and he has to keep himself busy in order to avoid the thoughts that could set this “worm” free in his mind. For Howie, the uncanny manifests itself in the trauma he has been trying to forget by reinventing himself as a self-made man with power and money.

To further explain the term uncanny, Gordon has stated the following: “uncanny experiences are haunting experiences. There is something there and you 'feel' it strongly. It has a shape, an electric empiricity, but the evidence is barely visible, or highly symbolized” (51). It could be argued that the whole journey of Danny travelling to the castle, and the events taking place there, result in uncanny and life-altering experiences.

According to Beville, “in many respects, the Gothic has been critically considered along similar grounds to those of postmodernism, as it is too often seen as a means of accessing the real or unconscious and the dark side of subjectivity and reality, through its excesses, abjections and monsters, but more profoundly through its appropriation of the sublime effects of terror”(50).

The dark side of the human psyche, as mentioned earlier, is often shown in Gothic fiction via an “evil twin” type of character. In Gothic postmodern fiction, as in *The Keep*, this dark side of the self exists inside the characters themselves, and they try to keep it concealed by keeping up the facade of their self-created personalities. This way, instead of there being an actual ghost that haunts the protagonists of the novel, it is their past and their bad memories that function as the “ghosts” in the novel. Or as Beville describes this Gothic terror, “the ghosts of otherness that haunt our fragile selves” (41). For Howie, the ghost appears whenever he is forced to think about his childhood trauma. For Holly, the ghost of her past is always present by making her want to relapse and do drugs again.

For Danny, his own dark side, is what he calls “the worm”. For him, *the worm* inside him is something that only comes out when he is not prepared, or when something unexpected happens. *The worm* for him may represent guilt, or in a more broad sense, all the memories and feelings of

inadequacy that he is trying to suppress.

When compared to Gothic postmodernism, in traditional Gothic fiction, for example in *Frankenstein*, the monster is a separate entity, and has “a horrifying physical appearance” (Lancaster, 134). It can be argued that in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the monster in fact is an embodiment of the bad qualities and evilness of its creator, Victor Frankenstein, even though he does not want to see the monster being a part of him. Lancaster has analyzed this as follows: “Instead of recognizing the Monster as an extension of himself, Frankenstein only sees how his human form differs from this monstrosity before him” (135). When compared to this, the postmodern Gothic monster is something even more indefinite, as in *The Keep*, the monster or “the worm” is Danny's inner voice. It is a voice that keeps suggesting that he might not be as calm and composed as he is trying to be, and that other people might see his weakness if he is not able to hide it from them.

Therefore, I would argue that, the monster for both Danny and Howie seems to be the fear itself. The horrible monster that they do not want to face is their own fear of the memories and anxieties they are trying to forget. This way, Gothic postmodern fear in the novel is not as much aimed towards something physical, but instead, the fear itself is as frightening as a Gothic monster or a haunting would be. Danny might point his paranoid thoughts towards Howard, but the real reason for all his anxieties can be found within himself.

When considering Danny's anxieties, as a character has one very postmodern trait – the tendency to overanalyze his own behavior and the people around him and their motives. There seems to be an array of jumbled thoughts inside his head that constantly keep him busy and unable to focus on the things that actually are happening around him, and eventually it is his tendency to overthink that pushes him into paranoia, which as an idea is a very postmodern concept. Jerry Aline Flieger has analyzed the relation between postmodernism and paranoia in his article, where he claims that “the transparency of our information-saturated monad, in the age of instantaneous

'contact' and access, doubtless confers a paranoid modality to 'postmodern' life, giving us the feeling that we are watched everywhere" (87).

This idea of someone watching and observing us is familiar from modern and postmodern literature, and most famously has appeared in George Orwell's dystopic future in *1984*. In Danny's case, at the end of the novel he is absolutely certain that the whole idea of his invitation to the castle is actually Howie's elaborate plot to harm him as a revenge of what happened back in their childhood. Danny's paranoia, *the worm*, then takes hold of him, and the results are devastating.

When analyzing Danny's paranoia through Flieger's idea of postmodern paranoia, it is interesting how he feels as if his cousin Howie is the one watching him. Danny's need to be online all the time is one of his most defining features as a character. Therefore, it is as if he has lost his connection to real life and real people. His wifi connection is what keeps him sane and the people around him are the ones that he does not trust. At the end of the novel, however, the tables are turned and the voices at the other end of Danny's wifi connection turn into "ghosts" of the people Danny thought he once knew.

## 5. Conclusion

When analyzing the feeling of fear, Gothic fiction as a genre is one that is linked to the concept of fear and frightening themes. When this is combined with the thematic elements common to postmodern fiction, a specific literary genre of Gothic postmodernism is created. In relation to this, Beville states in her study, “The Gothic is the clearest mode of expression in literature for voicing the terrors of postmodernity” (8). These common nominators between the two genres are the main reasons behind this thesis, and my main focus being on Gothic postmodern fears and anxieties.

The two genres have quite different backgrounds, as Gothic fiction has a long tradition with its beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, continuing to this day, with characteristic themes and literary elements. Postmodernism in literature, on the other hand, is a much newer literary genre with experimental style and themes relating closely to the concept of the “self” and subjectivity.

As it has been stated in this thesis, Gothic postmodernism combines these two different literary genres, Gothic fiction and postmodernism, and in this way creates a literary style of its own. The purpose of this thesis has been to analyze Jennifer Egan's novel *The Keep*, first as a work of Gothic postmodernism, and then as a novel about themes of imprisonment and escape, as well as in the broader sense of portraying modern fears and anxieties.

Maria Beville has defined the combination of the two genres as being “intertwined into a controversial mode of writing that could be referred to as a literary monster” (16). The complexity of the postmodern features combined with the Gothic themes and literary features do make this genre unique, and in my opinion, worthwhile of the academic attention it still is lacking. The two literary genres fit together seamlessly, as both manifest similar ideas and thematic elements. Beville states “its [Gothic postmodernism's] fascination with terror, the negative and the irrational, and its hostility toward accepted codes of reality, place it firmly in the realm of revolution” (16).

At first, it was important to define the two different literary genres; Gothic fiction and postmodern fiction. After this, it is easier to see what kind of literary style is created when these two

are combined. The decision to analyze Egan's novel as a Gothic postmodern piece of literature can be justified, as from the beginning of the story, the Gothic as well as the postmodern elements are clear to see. Also, the way the novel is self-conscious in its style hints towards there being at least some level of intentionality in the way the novel is written to be a model example of Gothic postmodern fiction.

According to Beville, "in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century context, Gothic terror and anxiety related to a rapidly changing world defined by violence, disorientation and loss of meaning and faith. Other important themes included those probably most familiar from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; power of science, godlessness, social anarchy and privation. It was at the dawn of postmodernity, when these issues suddenly re-emerged" (23).

I would argue that when considering this, it is relevant to study Egan's novel indeed from the perspective of modern fears and anxieties, as they as themes are at the core of Gothic postmodernism. The two other central themes analyzed in this thesis, imprisonment and escape, were a natural choice to be analyzed, as they seem to recur in the novel, and also can be treated from the perspective of Gothic postmodern anxieties. As it has been analyzed with detail in this thesis, the idea of being free and escaping a prison, whether it be a mental or a physical place, is a recurring theme in the novel, and also a very postmodern concept.

One could argue that in the case of *The Keep*, the genre and style of Gothic postmodernism functions as the outermost layer of the story, creating a very specific atmosphere and layout for the events that are unravelling. In the deeper level of the novel, there are the fears and anxieties that are manifested through the sometimes irrational actions of the characters. The last layer of the story consists of the themes of imprisonment and escape that are closely linked with the fears of the characters, as many of those stem from the fear of imprisonment, whether it be mental or physical. I would argue that *The Keep* as a Gothic postmodern novel consists of these three layers, through which it has been analyzed in this thesis.

## WORKS CITED

**Primary Material**

Egan, Jennifer. *The Keep*. 2006.

**Secondary Sources**

- Aguirre, Manuel. "Geometries of Terror: Numinous Spaces in Gothic, Horror and Science Fiction". *Gothic Studies*. 10, 1: 1-17.
- Beville, Maria. *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*. 2009. Amsterdam; Toronto: Rodopi.
- Bewes, Timothy. "The Novel as an Absence: Lukács and the Event of Postmodern Fiction". 2004. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. 38, 1: 5-20.
- Bloom, Clive. *Gothic Horror*. 2007. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Botting, Fred. "Future Horror". 1999. *Gothic Studies*. 1, 2: 139-155.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. 1996. London: Routledge.
- Botting, Fred. "Hypocrite Vampire". *Gothic Studies*. 2007. Lancaster University. 9, 1: 16-49.
- Botting, Fred. *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. 2008. Manchester University Press.
- Emandi, Elena Maria. "Early Gothic Fiction in English Literature". 2013. *Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies*. 5, 9: 82-87.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. Web version, accessed 18.1.2015. <http://global.britannica.com/>.
- Flieger, Jerry Aline. "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye". 1997. *New Literary History*. 28, 1: 87-109.
- Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History and Notion*. 1997. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. 2008. University of Minnesota Press.
- Harrison, Victoria S. "Postmodern Thought and Religion: Open Traditionalism and Radical Orthodoxy on Religious Belief and Experience. 2010. *Heythrop Journal*. 51, 6: 962-974.
- Hume, Robert D. "Gothic versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel". 1956. *Modern Language Association*. Northrop Frye. 23, 2: 282-290.

- Howarth, Charles. "Encountering the Ageing Body in Modernity: Fear, Vulnerability and Contamination". 2014. *Journal for Cultural Research*. 18, 3: 233-248.
- Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin De Siècle*. 1996. In *Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-century Literature and Culture*: Cambridge University Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. 1986. Waterloo, ON, CAN: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. 1980. New York: Arno Press.
- Lancaster, Ashley Craig. "From Frankenstein's Monster to Lester Ballard: The Evolving Gothic Monster". 2008. *Midwest Quarterly*. 49, 2: 132-148.
- Laughlin, Robert L. "After the Revolution: US Postmodernism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". 2013. *Narrative*. 21, 3: 284-295.
- Link, Alex. "The Mysteries of Postmodernism, or, Fredric Jameson's Gothic Plots". 2009. *Gothic Studies*. 11, 1: 70-85.
- Lloyd-Smith, Allan. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 2005. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. 1984. Transl. Bennington and Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Markley, A. A. "Mary Shelley's New Gothic". 2001. *Gothic Studies*. 3, 1: 15.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. 1987. London: Routledge.
- Morris, David B. "Gothic Sublimity". 1985. *New Literary History*. 16, 2: 299-319. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Neuman, Justin. "In Search of a Gothic Proust: Tales of Terror and the Uncanny in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*". 2008. *Gothic Studies*. 10, 2: 84-93.
- Oxford English Dictionary. Web version, accessed 21.11.2017. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>
- Punter, David. *New Companion to the Gothic*. 2012. Somerset, NJ: Wiley.
- Radcliffe, Ann. "On the Supernatural in Poetry". 1826. *New Monthly Magazine*. 16, 1: 145-152.
- Redding, Arthur. *Haints: American Ghosts and Millennial Passions, and Contemporary Gothic Fictions*. 2011. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Spooner, Catherine. "Gothic in Contemporary Popular Culture" 2007. *Gothic Studies*. Lancaster University.
- Vargish, Thomas. "Technology and Impotence in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*". 2009. *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*. 21, ½: 322-337.

- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. 1984. New Accents. London: Methuen.
- Wehmeier, Sally, ed. 2000. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wiley, Norbert. "The Post-Modern Self: A Retrospective". 2012. *Society*. 49, 9: 328-332.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1890. E-book: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/174>
- Williams, Kristian. "Dorian Gray and the Moral Imagination". 2010. *Common Review*. 8, 3: 26-33.f