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Constructing the Southern Ontario Gothic in Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* and Barbara Gowdy's *Falling Angels*

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## I. Introduction: Southern Ontario Gothic and Southern Gothic – Defining the Genres

The aim of this thesis is to define the framework of the Southern Ontario Gothic as a genre in comparison with its American counterpart – the Southern Gothic. Despite being two independent Gothic subgenres, this thesis will examine their shared narrative constructs which convey the notion of Southern Gothicism as a concept which surpasses the limits of a single genre. As critics use various terms for both Southern Ontario Gothic and Southern Gothic narratives, the introductory chapter will also try to explain the problematic behind defining these Gothic subgenres.

The constructs of the Southern Ontario Gothic will be exemplified in the readings of three novels: Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), Barbara Gowdy's *Falling Angels* (1989) and a collection of short stories – Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978). The thesis will display and explain the Southern Ontario Gothic narrative constructs common to the aforementioned narratives, based on both the Canadian literary theory as well as the American Southern Gothic literary practice.

### 1.1. The Southern Gothics

As this thesis will examine the characteristics common to Southern Ontario Gothic and the American Southern Gothic, the first focus will be on key traits of the genres. For practical reasons when referring to both genres and their common features, the term “the Southern Gothics”<sup>1</sup> will be applied. The term is coined for the purpose of this thesis as a term similar to “Southern Gothicism” with an important distinction that it refers specifically to the two Southern Gothic subgenres in question – the American Southern Gothic and the Canadian Southern Ontario Gothic and to their common characteristics.

The Southern Gothic literature came to the fore in the USA in 1920s with the works of William Faulkner. Soon a set of Southern writers started following in Faulkner’s footsteps and thus emerged the subgenre of the American Gothic that became widely known as the Southern Gothic. The term itself was coined by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Ellen Glasgow, who used it first in her article “Heroes and Monsters” in 1935. Glasgow used the term deprecatingly, blaming the Southern Gothic school of writers for “the tedious mass production

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<sup>1</sup>The term was coined based on the plural form of the term “Gothic”, i.e. “Gothics”, which is at times used in literary theory dealing with the Gothic genre. For instance, it was used in F.S. Frank’s *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel* (1987) and in C. Morin's and N. Gillespie's (ed.) *Irish Gothics* (2014).

of degeneracy in [Southern] fiction”, for being “[the] literary gospel of futility and despair”(3-4) and believing that this kind of literature carries no greater value for the age in which it was written and for culture in general. Fortunately, Ms Glasgow’s opinion on the genre did not prevail since Southern Gothic flourished fast enough and provided literary masterpieces such as William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), Carson McCullers’ *Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1952) and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960). Along with the aforementioned writers, the Southern Gothic also includes the writings of George Washington Cable, Eudora Welty, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, Erskine Caldwell, Harry Crews, Dorothy Allison, Clyde Edgerton, Lee Smith, William Gay, Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison, Reynolds Price, Alice Walker, James Dickey, Beth Henley and many other authors who submerge their narratives into the fibers of the American South – into its haunting atmosphere and grotesque imagery. In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) Leslie Fiedler names the writers of the Southern Gothic post-Faulknerian gothicists and divides them into masculine and feminine Faulknerians who in their writings apply “the Faulknerian syndrome of disease, death, defeat, mutilation, idiocy and lust” (449, 450, 452). Fiedler was on a good trail distinguishing the authors spreading “the Faulknerian syndrome” (450). However, from today’s standpoint the gender distinction of the writers in question seems unnecessary and the categories centred on one author provide neither a clear nor too useful division of Southern Gothic writers. As the thesis deals with the thematic of two regional Gothics, the advantage will be given to the geographic division of the Gothic genre since it proves to be the simplest and perhaps the most logical one, as it will be shown in the analysis of Southern Ontario Gothic narratives in question. By providing literary evidence exhibiting the elements of the Gothic set within a distinctly Southern context, the roles of the South and the Gothic will be reinforced as the two key concepts in structuring the Southern Gothics, which will be explained in the following chapters.

The Canadian counterpart of the American Southern Gothic was first dubbed the “Southern Ontario Gothic” by Timothy Findley in the interview with Graeme Gibson, included in Gibson’s book of interviews – *Eleven Canadian Novelists* – and first published in 1973 (qtd. in Hepburn and Hurley 1085). The Southern Ontario Gothic literature emerged in the 1970s and includes the writings of Matt Cohen, Raymond Knister, James Reaney, Marian Engel, Scott Symons, Joan Barfoot, Tom Marshall, Robertson Davies, Carol Shields, Timothy Findley, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Barbara Gowdy, who all, according to Hepburn and Hurley, “share a sense of distinct regional, even mythological, place where horror, murder, and bodily violations are not uncommon” (1085). In this brief definition one can notice traits

very similar to those Fiedler described in his definition of “the Faulknerian syndrome” as the Southern Ontario Gothic authors deal with the same strange, dark and horrifying events intercepting ordinary life. In this case the geographic part of the name refers to the Canadian region of Southern Ontario, since all of the above-mentioned Canadian authors (similarly to the American Southern Gothicists) write about the Southern region – only they immerse their characters and narratives into Canadian, Southern Ontario locales. Their narratives are marked with the Southern Ontario atmosphere, which corresponds to the atmosphere of the American Southern Gothic narratives. Branko Gorjup describes the Southern Ontario Gothic as an imaginative landscape, a “world that is both displaced and realistic, symbolic and referential, in which strange and unpredictable things happen to ordinary characters, whose lives are deeply rooted in small-town or rural mentality” (960). Gorjup's definition of the Southern Ontario Gothic can be easily related to the literary works belonging to the American Southern Gothic and likewise connected with Fiedler's notion of the Faulknerian syndrome. However, despite the obvious connections one can still notice the critics' preference for naming and defining Southern Ontario Gothic literary works with various other Gothic labels.

## 1.2. The Gothic as the Parent Genre and the Issue of Defining a Genre

In order to approach the problem of defining the Southern Gothics from their roots, one must begin by analyzing the Gothic as their parent genre. Gothic as a genre – or Gothic literature, Gothic fiction, Gothic horror – first appeared in Britain in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1794), reaching its prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). However, the Gothic genre did not remain secluded as strictly British or European genre; it emerged in the United States almost immediately after the first British Gothic novels. The American Gothic started off with the novels by Charles Brockden Brown, George Lippard and John Neal and flourished with such prominent Gothic authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe (Crow 24-25). In Canada the Gothic genre began with John Richardson's historical romance *Wacousta; or, The Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* (1832) and Susanna Moodie's memoir *Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada* (1852) (Howells 105-106). The key features of the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic novels remained the same, including common motifs and narrative constructs,

regardless of the continent on which they appeared. With the analysis of the Gothic came different divisions of the genre. The Gothic is often divided into many smaller, “national”, or distinct geographic Gothics such as the British, the Irish, the Scottish, the Australian, the American or the Canadian Gothic (Spooner and McEvoy). Apart from the division according to various geographic locations of the Gothic, one can also distinguish the Gothic literature according to the century in which it was written. Thus, one can talk about the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Gothic (Spooner and McEvoy). One can also notice the theme-based division, which is usually closely connected with the socio-cultural context of a certain geographic Gothic which then functions as an umbrella term for smaller or theme-based Gothics. Thus, for instance, Canadian Gothic narratives can be easily labelled with terms such as the colonial Gothic, the postcolonial Gothic, the wilderness Gothic, the feminist Gothic, the neo-Gothic or the regional Southern Ontario Gothic, depending on a critic’s perspective and criteria of classification (Kulperger; Hammill; Szabó; Hepburn and Hurley; Howells; Snodgrass).

Therefore, one can conclude that the aforementioned Gothic subgenres are not mutually exclusive – at times and in certain instances one can find similarities or characteristics that cross borders between subgenres. In this case, the distinctive Southern Ontario Gothic traits will be traced in four different Canadian narratives to confirm the similarities with the American regional Southern Gothic genre. In a similar fashion, Teresa A. Goddu claims that American Gothic, unlike British Gothic, is less easily specified in terms of a particular time period or group of authors. Goddu states that the American Gothic is most recognizable as a regional form, claiming that “[i]dentified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation’s ‘other,’ becoming the repository from which the nation wants to disassociate itself” (3-4). Here, Goddu equalizes the American Gothic with the Southern Gothic by attributing it the role of an outcast for the entire country, not only the Southern region. Goddu’s claim will be confirmed later in the thesis as it reflects itself most conspicuously in the stock characters of the Southern Gothics that represent the other from which society wants to dissociate itself. Another similar example of the appropriation of the Southern Gothic genre can be found in Irving Malin’s *New American Gothic* (1962) in which Malin grouped Southern Gothic writers Flannery O’Connor, Carson McCullers and Truman Capote together with James Purdy, John Hawkes and J.D. Salinger under the genre he dubbed “the new American Gothic” (Malin). Again, the Southern Gothic is put together in the same context of the American Gothic. Malin’s designation also works in favour of the notion represented in this thesis that the American Gothic functions well as an umbrella term for the

Southern Gothic, as Canadian Gothic does for the Southern Ontario Gothic. Malin's work also shows how literary works of Southern Gothic genre share various similarities with Gothic novels that one does not necessarily connect with the same region, which points out the resemblances of neighbouring genres or, rather, a parent genre and its subgenres. This connection is reflected in the definition of the Southern Gothics as a combination of the two spheres – the Gothic and the South. The elements of the Gothic are placed in a southern context – either that of the Southern Ontario or that of the American South. Thus, as an end result one can notice an interesting synthesis of the Gothic that is domesticated, set in familiar surroundings and that focuses on characters' morals and psyche, but which also reflects the horrors of the physical aspect of humanity as well, mainly through the extensive use of grotesque imagery.

M.H. Abrams defines genre as a type or a class of literature in which the criteria for classification of literary works is highly variable – as a loosely grouped family of works with no essential defining features, but only a set of family resemblances that not all family members have to share (Abrams 115-116). This thesis will show that the Southern Ontario Gothic works within the same set of family resemblances – the same constructive elements, within which its American counterpart, the Southern Gothic, operates as well. However, the thesis will also verify Abrams' variable aspect of the genre as it will demonstrate that not every constructive element has to be present in all narratives representing the genre, as long as the occurrence of Southern Ontario Gothic elements that are present in the novel is set within the framework based on four different components: the haunted Southern setting and the specific atmosphere, the typical Southern Gothic characters of the other, the recurring themes of domestic horror and/or themes of righteousness and sin and, finally, the grotesque which permeates all these elements (see table 1 on p.11). By analysing Findley's, Atwood's and Gowdy's novels and Munro's story collection the thesis will depict how these elements function within four different composites, but nevertheless show the genre-specific family resemblances of the Southern Ontario Gothic.

### 1.3. The Concept of “the South” and the Haunted Southern Setting

The locale and the atmosphere of the South, whether in its American or Canadian form, seem to bring together the unique type of domesticated Gothic which emanates the grotesque of everyday life, the terror in the place where one should feel the most secure – in one’s home. The South proves to be the most lucrative geographic and cultural area for production of such home-made horrors. Authors of both Southern Ontario Gothic and Southern Gothic write about the South: they put their characters and their narratives in distinct Southern or Southern-like locales and submerge them in distinct “Southern atmosphere”. Although one may notice different cultural references and other distinctions like characters’ dialectal speech or some other detail of a cultural context that can be found in American South and not in Canadian Southern Ontario, what is common to both genres is the haunted setting amalgamated from typical Southern locales and typical atmosphere (see table 1 on p. 11). Dušan Stamenković connects the genres in his cognitive semantic analysis of the concept of South in Robertson Davies’ *Fifth Business*, the novel representing the Southern Ontario Gothic, and Carson McCullers’ *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, as a Southern Gothic novel. He chose the novels as a subject for his study explaining that “they have a set of common issues” since “they are ‘products’ of the two southern communities presented in these novels, one belonging to Southern Ontario and the other to the Southern States of the USA” (125). After comparing the orientational metaphors with examples from the novels, Stamenković concludes that “*South* is firmly bound to the concept of *down*” and from this notion comes the connection of the South with such concepts as *sad*, *bad*, *depravity*, *low status*, *being subject to control*, *sickness* and *death*” (Stamenković 135, emphasis in the original). This provides insight into the connection between the domestic horror and the Southern setting since the themes of the Southern Gothics seem to be connected physically with the geographic area of the South, but even more so conceptually and semantically as the meaning of “South” evolved into an ominous concept, an amalgam of the phrase “things going south”. Two questions arise here, the first concerning the reason why one usually connects these concepts to the area of the South, more prominently to the American South, and the second concerning the reasons why the South became gothic. American Southern Gothic writer Harry Crews explained this characteristic of the South in the following words:

Truth of the matter was, stories was everything and everything was stories [sic]. Everybody told stories. It was a way of seeing who they were in the world. It was their understanding of



themselves. It was letting themselves know how they believed the world worked, the right way and the way that was not so right (Douglas, *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*).

Stamenković notices that same interest in moral issues in Southern Ontario as well, providing his own definition of Southern Ontario Gothic as a genre which, “[l]ike its parent genre [the American Southern Gothic] relies on supernatural, ironic, or unusual events to guide the plot” and which includes “[a]ctions and people that act against humanity, logic, and morality and are all portrayed unflatteringly” (128). In order to portray such actions and such people, both American and Canadian Southern Gothicists had to submerge their imaginary worlds into the specific Southern setting marked with the specific Southern atmosphere. Since the meaning of South evolved, the setting and the atmosphere do not have to correspond literally with the actual geographic area of Southern Ontario or the American South, as long as the concept of the South is present in the narrative. In other words, the notion of South outgrew the actual geographic borders of Southern regions.

The concept of the South is represented in Southern Gothic narratives through specific constructive elements that outline the Southern setting and the atmosphere. There are four distinct Southern locales which one can recognize as constructive elements of the Southern Gothics and these are: the family house, the road, the Gothic water and the woods (see table 1 on p. 11). Irving Malin uses similar locales for his definition of the new American Gothic, “the three images” that are present in the old Gothic as well: the haunted castle i.e. the other room, the voyage into the forest and the reflection (Malin 79, 106). To Malin the other room represents the private space of confined narcissism; the voyage opposes it as it suggests movement which is horrifying because it is “usually erratic, circular, violent, or distorted” and the reflection symbolizes the narcissist’s distorted mirror of reality” (80, 106, 129). In Southern Gothics the old Gothic haunted castle is represented with the family house which is now haunted only with the terror and the violence between family members. The family house can take various forms. It can be an old mansion or a cabin in the woods, but whatever its form is, one thing remains the same – it often includes a “Gothic room” which serves as a prison for family members. The concept of the Gothic room is similar to Malin’s “other room” with one distinct difference – Malin does not connect the confinement to the physical confinement set for one’s family but to the psychology of an individual i.e. the other room which represents “the prisons of the spirit” caused by character’s narcissism (90). In Southern Ontario Gothic, the Gothic room represents the internment as a means of both physical and psychological torture that one family member inflicts on another. This type of confinement

causes psychological damage to its victims, but, in this case, it cannot be connected with narcissism, rather with violence and abusive behaviour of Gothic family members.

Moreover, one can find Malin's "voyage into the forest" in the Southern Gothics as well, only divided into two separate locales: the road and the woods because each functions independently as a Southern setting although they may coincide in some instances. The road is only a physical attribution, a placement for the theme-like concept of a journey or, as Malin puts it, a voyage. The category of the Gothic road is ambiguous in its nature since it denotes a setting, a background in which events take place, but at the same time it suggests a movement and even reflects the purpose for this movement – it can be a trip, a stroll, a quest of some kind or a journey. Because of that, the road as a setting is interchangeable with the journey as the purposeful movement on it, which can function as a theme and a narrative drive in Southern Ontario Gothic narratives. The woods, as in old Gothic, are common in the Southern Gothics as well, as one of primary locales marked by horror, death and decay.





The fourth image of the Southern Gothics that Malin omits in his analysis of the new American Gothic is that of the Gothic water. The river, the lake, the bayou or the swamp in Southern Gothic narratives function as the Gothic water because they are always intertwined with the same imagery that defines the Southern Gothic scenery – the images of death, decay, terror and grotesque. The same images also build the framework for the Southern atmosphere, which is comprised of the small town mentality; the feelings of dread and unrest; the feeling that something bad is going to happen and then when it happens, of the grotesque imagery of decay and degeneration (see table 1 on p. 11). Finally, the most important feature of Southern Ontario Gothic locales and the atmosphere is that the characters, their actions and the unfortunate events that happen to them, function as key factors that transform the ordinary family house, lake, woods and road into a haunted Southern Gothic setting. That is the reason why it is difficult to analyze the Southern locales and Southern atmosphere without examining the themes that constitute Southern Gothic narratives.

#### 1.4. The Themes and the Framework of the Southern Gothics

Southern Gothic narratives are defined with the themes of domestic horror and the themes of righteousness and sin. The themes of domestic horror are mostly reserved for their place of origin, the family house, but nevertheless they can occur in other Southern locales, because wherever the dysfunctional family goes, domestic horror follows.

The person afflicting the domestic horror and pain is one's father, mother, husband, wife or some other family member. Thus, the Southern Gothics almost always include a Gothic family. The violence and the abuse at the hand of a family member cause both the physical pain as well as the psychological trauma. The ones which should provide the security and warmth of a home are the ones causing the horror. Here, evil is most prominently reserved for the Gothic father. The Gothic mother functions as a weakling protagonist and/or a morally righteous hero but at times can contribute to the domestic horror within a dysfunctional family. The ones suffering the terror are the children who usually play the role of a weakling protagonist. The child is the victim, either of abuse or murder, or simply of growing-up in an unhealthy and destructive environment. Themes of domestic horror directly reflect on Southern Gothic stock characters since they include dysfunctional families and family terror filled with violence, incest, madness, alcoholism, murder and suicide. The portrait of a dysfunctional family, however, does not always have to be a central Southern Gothic theme. The Southern Gothic plot also includes the recurring themes that can take place outside the family – the themes of righteousness and sin. These are the themes that are focused on the moral issues depicting crime, injustice, class differences, racism, bigotry and religious fanaticism. This means that the themes of righteousness and sin can also include abuse, murder, suicide, madness, sexual deviancy and alcoholism, only outside of the family context. These themes of right and wrong often deal with the problem of being different from the rest of the society which results in alienation and psychological or moral crisis of an individual. Such themes produce characters representing the other – the misfits and those who society either frowns upon or discards, i.e. the people from the fringes of society. The characters of the other can represent the morally corrupt (abusers, sinners, loose women); the poor and people with no roots (homeless people, orphans); the physically impaired and the mentally ill (mutes, invalids, madmen, mentally disabled); addicts (most prominently alcoholics) and members of a minority group (homosexuals, people of a different race or a different religion).

Table 1 Constructive Elements of the Southern Gothics

CONSTRUCTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SOUTHERN ONTARIO GOTHIC AND THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC <sup>2</sup>			
HAUNTED SETTING	STOCK CHARACTERS	NARRATIVE DRIVE	
		DOMESTIC HORROR	THEMES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SIN
<p><b>Southern locales:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ family house, cabin, an old mansion; the Gothic room – the place of confinement</li> <li>❖ small town</li> <li>❖ the road ( the journey, the trip, the quest)</li> <li>❖ Gothic water: the lake, the swamp, the river</li> <li>❖ the woods</li> </ul> <p><b>Southern atmosphere:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ the feelings of dread and inner unrest</li> <li>❖ death, decay and degeneration</li> <li>❖ small town mentality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accent on characters' psyche, morality and social background</li> <li>- include <b>the other</b> and the people from the fringes of society:</li> <li>❖ alcoholics</li> <li>❖ mentally ill, mentally disabled</li> <li>❖ physically impaired or flawed</li> <li>❖ sinners, loose women</li> <li>❖ homosexuals, queer people</li> <li>❖ orphans, tomboys</li> <li>❖ the morally corrupted: murderers, abusers</li> </ul> <p>ROLES THEY ASSUME:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Gothic family</b> with the emphasis on <b>the Gothic father</b> (often replaced by <b>Gothic husband/lover</b>), <b>Gothic mother</b></li> <li>❖ <b>the weakling protagonist</b></li> <li>❖ <b>the morally righteous hero/heroine</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ dysfunctional family relationship filled with terror (abuse, madness, alcoholism etc.)</li> <li>❖ strange, unusual or socially unaccepted event, usually related to one's family</li> <li>❖ loss of family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- themes of life and death, right and wrong:</li> <li>❖ religious fanaticism and unique mythologies</li> <li>❖ psychological or moral crisis of an individual</li> <li>❖ the issue of being different from the rest of the society, racism and bigotry</li> </ul>
			
<b>Grotesque (permeates all the above elements)</b>			

- a. Note: All combinations are possible. The prerequisite for Southern Ontario Gothic genre (or the American Southern Gothic) is that the narrative has to have at least one constructive element from each category, including the permeating presence of the grotesque.

<sup>2</sup>The making of the table was inspired by the chapter "Three Images" in Irving Malin's *New American Gothic* in which the author analyzes crucial components of the new American Gothic in the form of three images – the other room, the voyage and the reflection. The table was based on the readings of various Southern Gothic and Southern Ontario Gothic novels, dramas and short stories, including the four narratives analysed here.

The characters, mostly protagonists, can assume several prominent roles in Southern Gothic narratives: the role of the Gothic father, the Gothic mother, the weakling protagonist and the morally righteous hero. Often one character can operate in several roles as they are not mutually exclusive.

Perhaps the most distinguished constructive element in both Southern Gothic genres is the use of the grotesque. The grotesque is a literary mode, “a stylistic enhancement of Gothic literature”, which is marked with “a perverse intertwining of ludicrous, estranged beings or comic events and their tragic outcomes” and “dismaying, dehumanizing, or shocking imagery of distortions of nature, ugliness, the bizarre, and deformity” (Snodgrass 166-167). The grotesque functions as a leitmotif of the Southern Gothics as it imbues all aspects and all the other constructive elements of the genres. Michael Gillum claims that the grotesque represents “(the) art with bad manners. It challenges our ideals and our notions of proper order with dissonant elements – disgusting, embarrassing, incongruous, or frightening intrusions” (Gillum 13). Because of its extensive use in Gothic novels, the grotesque is sometimes even used as a replacement term for the Gothic genre, even though it is not a genre, but a literary mode. Michael Greene clarifies this correlation with the syntagm “gothic and grotesque” explaining that “[w]hile each embraces a distinct set of phenomena, the two often work together, in part because formal qualities associated with the gothic frequently cultivate the grotesque” (Greene 443). While Gothic and grotesque often work together, the Southern Gothics and grotesque always work together. They are intertwined to such an extent that some critics use the term “Southern grotesque” to identify the Southern Gothic genre (Gleeson-White 108). Grotesque is interwoven with all constructive elements of the Southern Gothics. It is present in the setting and the atmosphere, in the themes and in the appearance and actions of the characters which mark the culmination of its use within the genres.

## II. Southern Ontario Gothic Constructive Elements in Findley's, Atwood's, Munro's and Gowdy's Narratives

### 2.1. The Southern Atmosphere and the Setting: Death and Decay

Findley, Atwood, Munro and Gowdy set their narratives in haunted Southern locales. Their plots take place in the family house or on the road, in the Gothic water or less often in the woods (only in Findley's and Atwood's novel). The family house is the primary setting which follows the major plotline because it is closely connected with the Gothic family and thus it conveys the domestic horror. On the other hand, the road, the Gothic water and the woods function as background settings whose role is to introduce the Southern atmosphere into the narrative. The aforementioned background locales are often intertwined and have one thing in common – they are followed by themes of death, decay and degeneration. Such themes instigate feelings of dread and unrest and announce worse things to happen in the narrative.

The road, i.e. the journey as its thematic counterpart, is the most common Southern locale in these narratives. Findley immediately immerses his reader into the glum Southern atmosphere with a Gothic journey at the beginning of his novel. The journey is that of Yaweh's messenger bird which has a mission to announce God's arrival on Earth. The bird manages to complete her mission; however, the quest results in her death transforming her journey into a Gothic one. Moreover, in Findley's novel the journey, the voyage, is the main theme, as its title suggests. Findley implies that the voyage on the ark is a never-ending Gothic journey. It is preceded by numerous brief journeys which result in death or horror, as seen in the previous example. Japeth's quest "to find his manhood" (Findley 23) is another example of such Gothic journey. His quest ends with an attack by cannibals who cook him in a tub filled with oil and spices. As a consequence, Japeth's skin turns permanently blue. His impending death is miraculously prevented by a lightning which strikes the woman who is supposed to prepare a meal out of him. Findley's use of the grotesque adds to the absurdity of the situation and culminates with the scene of cannibals eating and sucking raw flesh out of the woman's body, thus further highlighting the Southern atmosphere in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*.

Atwood's *Surfacing* also begins with a journey. The unnamed narrator's travels back home to search for her missing father. Death is not omitted, it is only postponed. Atwood introduces the Southern locales and the atmosphere immediately, with the narrator's first sentence: "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south" (7). The narrator returns to her childhood home – a family house, now a cabin, but her quest finally ends later in the narrative, with the discovery of her father's body in the lake. Thus, her quest becomes a Gothic journey.

Munro also includes a journey in order to instigate the Southern atmosphere in her narrative. She combines the grotesque with the mundane in the episode of Rose's trip by train, depicted in "Wild Swans". Munro announces the Gothic journey at the beginning of the story with Flo's warning: "Watch out [...] for people dressed up as ministers. They were the worst" (68). During the trip a priest sits next to Rose and they start a conversation. Soon the priest starts touching Rose in an inappropriate way thus turning an ordinary trip into a Gothic journey. Munro builds the Southern atmosphere on the fact that Rose fails to react while the priest is molesting her so it seems that both of them are pretending that nothing unusual is happening. The priest's immoral act along with Rose's confused thoughts on this event bring to the fore the sense of dread, inner unrest and moral degeneration and thus invoke the Southern atmosphere in Munro's story.

Gowdy's *Falling Angels* includes several Gothic journeys. Here all journeys function as an addition to the main plotline dealing with domestic horror in the dysfunctional family Field. The first journey includes girls running away from home. During their escape, they meet an old man looking like Santa Claus who invites them to his home. The old man's odd behaviour, especially his focus on the youngest Sandy, implies that he is a paedophile. After Norma realizes that something is wrong she confronts him and the old man gets upset and dies. Their escape, i.e. their Gothic journey ends unsuccessfully: the girls take the old man's money and return to their home by cab and their Gothic parents do not even notice their absence. Furthermore, there are two Gothic journeys in Gowdy's narrative which end with the Gothic water – the Niagara Falls. The first journey to the Falls includes a family trip by Joe and Mary Field with their baby boy Jimmy, which ends tragically. The baby drowns in Niagara River which thus becomes the Gothic water. The exact circumstances of his fall into the river are left untold. However, the fact that Jimmy and his death were hidden from the girls implies that the mother did not drop him into the water by accident. The second journey ensues after mother's death. The father and the girls drive to the Falls to scatter her ashes into

the water. Thus, once again the motif of death is bound together in a Southern locale of the Gothic water.

Findley's novel also includes the concept of Gothic water. In *Not Wanted on Voyage* Mrs Noyes has to cross the dangerous river twice to save Lotte and the fairies. Similarly to Gowdy, Findley achieves the attributes of the Gothic river by attaching the motif of death to it as it represents the imminent danger of death by drowning. On the second crossing, however, the motif of death incorporates itself not in the depths of the river, but on its surface, where Mrs Noyes finds the floating boat with a dead man sitting in it. Consequently, the man's demise becomes their salvation as they climb into the boat with the corpse and row themselves to safety. In the aforementioned examples Findley connects the Gothic water with the grotesque which corresponds to Rebecca C. McIntyre's description of the Southern river defined as "[an] escape into the unknown, a peep show of the grotesque, a blending of the realistic and the fantastic, which thrilled in a strange and disturbing way" (43). With such rendering of the Gothic river Findley announces the flood as the ultimate Gothic water which brings death to everyone. The only people to survive it are Noah and his family. The flood becomes a despised reality, a sublime and macabre landscape – the vision of diseased South (McIntyre 35, 40, 43) which serves as a metaphor for the society, that is, in Findley's case, a metaphor for human kind. Similarly to Gowdy's journeys which end at Niagara Falls, Findley uses the Gothic water as the setting of the domestic horror in a subplot. Mrs Noyes reveals to Emma the family secret that still haunts her – that she and Noah murdered Japeth's twin, a baby boy named Adam, by drowning him "not down there in the river" because "it wasn't deep enough then", but in a pond (Findley 165). Thus the pond as a place of murder transforms into the Gothic water.

In Atwood's *Surfacing* the lake represents the Gothic water. The lake is located next to the narrator's old family house, a cabin on an isolated island amidst the wilderness. However, the lake here has an ambiguous meaning, it is the place of death and decay in which the body of the narrator's father is found, but it also announces the change that will occur in narrator's life. The ominous meaning of the lake is announced earlier in the narrative with the episode in which the narrator reminisces about her brother's drowning:

My brother was under the water, face upturned, eyes open and unconscious, sinking gently; air was coming out of his mouth. It was before I was born but I can remember it as clearly as if I saw it, and perhaps I did see it: I believe that an unborn baby has its eyes open and can look out through the walls of the mother's stomach, like a frog in a jar (32).



In *Surfacing* water also symbolizes the primal location of rebirth as Atwood continuously connects it with the imagery of birth and creation. In the aforementioned example Atwood implies that the narrator's brother died, only to reveal later that he was saved by their mother. Atwood depicts the impact it had on the narrator:

His drowning never seemed to have affected him as much as I thought it should, he couldn't even remember it. If it had happened to me I would have felt there was something special about me, to be raised from the dead like that; I would have returned with secrets, I would have known things most people didn't (74).

Here the lake has an ambiguous meaning, it is a place of dying but it is also a place of narrator's redemption, a place from which life can emerge despite the death that surrounds it. The lake as both a symbol of death and a means of redemption and rebirth is seen in the scene in which narrator makes love to Joe and immediately thinks she is pregnant: "He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long" (161-162). The lost child represents the aborted child which echoes in her madness as another child she imagined losing. By imagining her child's forgiveness, the narrator forgives herself in order to let go of the past. By putting the lake in the same context with rebirth or resurrection, Atwood denotes the beginning of new life for the narrator. Before reaching the surface of her rebirth, the narrator becomes one with the Gothic setting: "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (Atwood 181). After she surfaces, she separates herself from wilderness. Thus begins the process of regaining her "self" along with her sanity. With the act of surfacing, the narrator is reborn and the lake and the woods become just a part of an ordinary landscape as it is indicated in the novel's last sentence: "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (192). In Atwood's novel there are no background settings since all Southern locales; the road, the family house, the lake and the woods, are interconnected and follow the major plotline – the emergence of the narrator's madness and, lastly, the return of her sanity.

In *Not Wanted on the Voyage* Findley uses the woods as another haunted Southern locale which announces death. Mottyl, Mrs Noyes' cat, observes both the human and the animal world. Findley transforms Mottyl's strolls in the forest into Gothic journeys which instigate the Southern atmosphere in his narrative. Mottyl's first stroll ends with a scene of death as she finds Emma's missing dog Barky in the woods:

It was the sound of death that would bring her to the little dog. In the woods, as in the fields, the smell of death was universal, since there was always some dead creature in the process of decay. But the sound of death was unique. It could be both dreadful and noble – and it brought to the victim a kind of respect that was not enjoyed in life. It was the sound of flies (Findley 56).

With this scene Findley introduces “the crown of flies” as a symbol of death in his narrative. The crown of flies functions as Mottyl’s nightmare because it reminds her of her child’s death:

This is how her last surviving child had died – after Doctor Noyes had taken all the others. The kitten had been ill from the Doctor’s experiments and yet had managed to escape. In his fear he had come to look for Mottyl, still being strongly attached to her smell – since the kitten was only ten weeks old. But he could not find her [...] Later, in the evening, she found him [...] He was lying in the sphinx position – entranced – and completely obscured by a crown of flies so vast that their noise could be heard a field away (Findley 56).

The child’s death haunting Mottyl also announces another sinister event – the death of a child she carries in her belly. The crown of flies discloses God’s demise as well. Yaweh experiences several Gothic journeys during which he survives seven attempts on his life. As revenge, he sentences all of his creation to death by flood. Then he sets out on another journey but in the moment of his departure a crown of flies appears in his carriage. Findley proclaims: “It was so. By entering the carriage, by seating Himself in their presence and by closing the door, the Lord God Father of All Creation had consented to His own death” (112), thus revealing that it will be God’s final, Gothic journey. Mottyl’s second stroll is also depicted as a Gothic journey that ends in the woods with the scene of animals waiting to die in the flood or already dying as Findley depicts it: “their cries were everywhere – and the stench of blood and offal” (145). With such macabre and poignant images Findley successfully conveys the Southern atmosphere in his novel.

Findley’s “crown of flies” shows that death can appear as a standalone motif in Southern Ontario Gothic narratives whose main function is to trigger the Southern atmosphere. Both Gowdy and Munro use it at the beginning of their narratives. Gowdy’s *Falling Angels* commences with the scene of Mrs Field’s funeral. Gowdy turns focus to her daughters and their thoughts of their deceased mother. Sandy ponders over mother’s autopsy, Norma wonders “Is she all here?” and Lou follows her line of thought by thinking: “...have they cut off her legs?” (Gowdy 5). The lack of emotions and the matter-of-fact tone of their thoughts

accentuate the grotesque of the situation and indicate that the girls are in fact members of a dysfunctional, Gothic family.

In “Royal Beatings”, the first story in her collection, Munro uses a similar approach in rendering death. The described death is that of Rose’s mother:

Her mother had died. She said to Rose’s father during the afternoon, “I have a feeling that is so hard to describe. It’s like a boiled egg in my chest, with the shell left on.” She died before night, she had a blood clot on her lung. Rose was a baby in a basket at the time, so of course could not remember any of this. She heard it from Flo, who must have heard it from her father (2).

Mother’s death is retold without emotions, as just another story or an everyday event. However, the retelling of how Rose’s mother dies functions as an important insight into Rose’s psyche and into distorted relationships in Rose’s family. The lack of emotions that Rose “feels” for her deceased mother echoes back to her as a lack of parental love coming from her father and stepmother. This episode shows the fine subtlety with which Munro weaves the Southern atmosphere in her stories.

In the Southern Ontario Gothic narratives in question Southern locales may serve as a setting for the main plotline, usually revolving around the Gothic family and the domestic horror or functioning as its echo – an addition which further clarifies the complex relationships between the members of a Gothic family. On the other hand, they can also function as a background setting which instigates the Southern atmosphere with motifs such as death, decay and degeneration.

## 2.2. Gothic Father and the Domestic Horror

Domestic horror functions as the main theme of Southern Ontario Gothic narratives and often intersects other constructs of the genre. Irving Malin claims that every work in new American Gothic contains “family terror” (8). The family terror; the abuse and the violence within the family, the lack of love and care, alcoholism, madness and depression, sexually inappropriate behaviour toward family members, murder and suicide of family members all contribute to the thematic of domestic horror. Findley's, Atwood's and Gowdy's novels, as well as Munro's short stories serve as representatives of Southern Ontario Gothic because they deal with violent and unnatural acts within dysfunctional families. The cause of domestic horror in these Gothic families is most notably reserved for one family member – the Gothic

father. The Gothic father is a privileged member of a patriarchal family who takes advantage of that privilege by behaving as an abusive and controlling tyrant. One can easily liken the Gothic father to the evil Gothic parent that Malin defines as:

The narcissistic parent [who] wins despite his weakness: he imposes his design upon the ineffectual child, who begins to reflect him. But the victory is hollow because destruction is always present for both. Only at rare times does the dream of past or future happiness, the love between parent and child, the knowledge of correct rules, enter to give peace. [...] When the microcosm breaks down: nothing is left; no one can help (78).

The Gothic father is, just like Malin's Gothic parent, guided by his narcissism and causing the disintegration of his family. The role of the Gothic father implies the aggressive and controlling behaviour not only towards his children, but also towards his wife and other family members. Findley's characters of Noah and Yaweh, the narrator's father and lover(s) in Atwood's novel, Joe Field, the priest and Sandy's lovers in Gowdy's *Falling Angels* and Rose's father, old man Tyde, Shortie McGill and his father in Munro's stories all assume the role of the Gothic father or his replacement – the Gothic husband/lover. Findley's Gothic father, Noah, is portrayed as a sadistic religious fanatic who abuses and murders family members that he perceives as "other". Noah shows all the characteristics of Freud's primal father:

The strong male [who] was the master and father of the whole horde: unlimited in his power, which he used brutally. All females were his property, the wives and daughters in his own horde as well as perhaps also those robbed from other hordes. The fate of the sons was a hard one; if they excited the father's jealousy they were killed or castrated or driven out (131).

Noah, like the primal father, abuses all female family members. Since he does not have his own daughters, he sexually abuses his daughters-in-law. Findley explains his erratic behaviour in the following passage:

This sort of rage – more of a performance than a reality – was necessary to keep Mrs Noyes in her place. Also, to intimidate the other women, lest they follow her example and get out of hand. There had been too much of this lately [...] And Hannah could get that faraway look of hers – as if she were contemplating something unheard of – possibly dangerous. So they had to be controlled – the lot of them; which was why Doctor Noyes was so quick with his performances of rage and other intimidating emotions (13-14).

When his “performances” fail him, Noah turns to violence. The ark becomes a replacement for the family house – a haunted place where domestic horror continues to occur. It is where family members are murdered, raped, beaten and abused. Katrin Berndt describes such family violence, i.e. the brutality caused by family members with the term “domestic terror” (8). A. F. Szabó uses a similar term, only she applies it to the entire genre – “the female (domestic) gothic” in which writers “have turned it to their use to sound their dissent from the patriarchal ideology that has sought to codify the female gender as an object while denying women the attributes required for a subject” (n. pag.). Noah’s possession of all women in the family culminates in a grotesque scene of Noah “deflowering”, i.e. raping Emma with a horn of a living unicorn. Findley describes the consequences of the torture, from Japeth's perspective:

His father holding the dog-sized beast with the horn – Emma held in an angular embrace by his brother Shem – while Sister Hannah crouched at Emma's feet, with a small red towel, and dabbed at something there that seemed to be a wound. Emma was screaming, still, and stamping the floor with her feet like someone trying to kill a snake. It took a whole minute for all these images to come together and deliver a single meaning which – even then – Japeth could not believe (Findley 264).

Instead of expressing anger toward his father, Japeth severs the unicorn’s horn and thus prolongs the animal’s suffering. Noah, just like the primal father, “castrates” his sons by appropriating their wives as well as their free thinking. Findley accentuates the grisly Southern atmosphere of the scene with the fact that half of the family is a willing accomplice to the torture of a family member. Noah is not the only Gothic father in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* since Findley represents God, Yaweh as the ultimate Gothic father who sentences all of his creation – his children, to die in the flood.

Munro’s, Findley’s and Gowdy’s narratives take up the concept of a Gothic room – a prison that one family member sets for others. In Munro’s story “Royal Beatings” the kitchen becomes the Gothic room, a place of confinement and torture for young Rose, the protagonist of Munro’s interconnected stories in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Whenever Rose does something wrong in the eyes of her stepmother Flo, the kitchen is turned into punishing area in which Rose’s father does the beating of Rose. Munro describes one such beating in the following paragraph:

She runs around the room, she tries to get to the doors. Her father blocks her off. Not an ounce of courage or of stoicism in her, it would seem. She runs, she screams, she implores. Her father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his

hands. Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her head ringing. Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in the face again. He shakes her and hits her against the wall, he kicks her legs. She is incoherent, insane, shrieking. *Forgive me! Oh please, forgive me!* Flo is shrieking too. *Stop, stop!* (20-21)

Rose's father occupies the role of the Gothic father in "Royal Beatings". It is indicated that he beats Rose on a regular basis and only at the command of his wife Flo – Rose's stepmother, to whom he is more partial than his own daughter. Munro concentrates on the issues of the Southern community and the importance of stories in it. Flo keeps a store right next to the kitchen so Rose's family house is turned into a functioning part of the small town Hanratty, Ontario. Flo and Rose are the main storytellers and the majority of the gossip they hear comes from Flo's store. Munro depicts the impact that Flo's storytelling has on young Rose in the following paragraph:

Rose could be drawn back—from watching the wind shiver along the old torn awning, catch in the tear—by this tone of regret, caution, in Flo's voice. Flo telling a story—and this was not the only one, or even the most lurid one, she knew—would incline her head and let her face go soft and thoughtful, tantalizing, warning. "I shouldn't even be telling you this stuff." (9)

Later Rose assumes Flo's role as she enrolls in high school. One thing remains the same in their storytelling – they always tell stories in which others are portrayed unflatteringly and in shameful positions because "Pitfalls were for others, Flo and Rose agreed" (49). In their stories of Hanratty townsfolk one can find more appalling instances of domestic horror and the grotesque than in the major plotline revolving around Rose's life. Lorna Hutchison defines Munro's stories as grotesque because of her use of "contradiction, as well as the presence of [...] absurdity, exaggeration, and the irrational" (188). The first instance that confirms Hutchison's definition is the story of Becky Tyde in "Royal Beatings". Munro renders it matter-of-factly:

The story being that the father beat them, had beaten all his children and beaten his wife as well, beat Becky more now because of her deformity, which some people believed he had caused (they did not understand about polio). The stories persisted and got added to. The reason that Becky was kept out of sight was now supposed to be her pregnancy, and the father of the child was supposed to be her own father. Then people said it had been born, and disposed of (8).

Becky Tyde is portrayed as a victim of severe physical, mental and sexual abuse caused by her Gothic father. The domestic horror in Tyde family instigates the event of another town story – the beating and death of Becky’s father. The old man Tyde is dragged out from his house into the snow and horsewhipped by “three useless young men” that were sent there by respectful men in town to punish him “in the interests of public morality” (Munro 9). As a consequence of the beating, the old man Tyde dies. Munro accentuates the horror of living in a dysfunctional family with the fact that Becky and her brother watch the beating of their father and both decide not to help him. In “Privilege” domestic horror takes place in the school toilet – the location which is reserved for “scenes of marvelous shame and outrage” (Munro 28). Main actors are Franny McGill and her brother Shortie who are caught having sex in the boys' toilet. Munro focuses on Franny's role in it:

Whose idea was this, for Franny and Shortie? Probably some of the big boys dared Shortie, or he bragged and they challenged him. One thing was certain: the idea could not be Franny’s. She had to be caught for this, or trapped. You couldn’t say caught, really, because she wouldn’t run, wouldn’t put that much faith in escaping. But she showed unwillingness, had to be dragged, then pushed down where they wanted her. (31).

Munro portrays Franny McGill as a tragic figure that dies as a victim of continual abuse. The mental disability and facial deformity are caused by her Gothic father. But in this case her brother Shortie takes up the incestuous role of a Gothic father.

The Gothic father is the antagonist in Gowdy's *Falling Angels*. Joe Field is the Gothic father, the head of the Field family, a controlling and abusive tyrant and an occasional drunkard. Gowdy describes the changes in his behaviour from his daughter Lou's perspective:

He's his old self – foul-tempered, laying down the law. But he doesn't hit Lou or Norma, even at the peak of his most lunatic rages. It seems he's gone off hitting. Lou doesn't believe the restraint will last. But it better, for his sake. After the last time he backhanded her, that day he took Norma out for her first driving lesson, she told herself she'd kill him if he ever laid a finger on her again (Gowdy 140).

Even when father acts “peacefully” Lou is sceptical because it is not in his nature to act that way. However, the Gothic father does something worse to his other daughter. He starts spending more time with unsuspecting Norma, grooming her with gifts. Then he gives her driving lessons, despite the fact that he forbids Lou the same thing. The harsh reality strikes Norma during their last driving lesson, when he attempts to sexually abuse her. The horror

and the absurdity of this incident cause great psychological damage to Norma. Gowdy conveys her thoughts and feelings in the following lines:

Her heart beats in her ears, clangs like bells. Where their father touched her, she burns. She thinks that she must tear off her jacket and sweater and lie her flaming skin on the frozen ground. She covers her face with her hands and is lost for several minutes in a dark profoundness of disgust and incomprehension (134).

Gowdy's Gothic father, like Malin's evil parent, creates an illusion – a possibility of a fatherly love and “the dream of future happiness” only to shatter it with his evil and grotesque actions. The intention to take advantage of the younger and weaker is also displayed in the older men whom Sandy dates – the Gothic lovers who take advantage of her and then discard her.

In *Falling Angels* the family house is a primary locale of domestic horror. That is the location in which mother spends her days in a drunken stupor while daughters do all the work around the house and endure father's abusive behaviour. At times the abused family members can escape, but only for a short while. Escape is impossible when the father decides to build a Gothic room – a fall-out bunker that he digs in their yard. The promised trip to Disneyland turns into a lockdown for the entire family. There is no light, no air and not enough food or water to last for almost two weeks of imprisonment, which “years later the girls would refer to not as 'when we were in the fallout shelter' but as 'when we almost died'” (Gowdy 67). Gowdy reminds the reader of the imminent vicinity of death by merging the macabre motif of the dead kitten as well as the leitmotif of falling in the scene of family's confinement:

Sandy squeezed a hand... their mother's – she could tell by the smallness. She was half sitting, half lying across their mother's and Norma's legs. The dark didn't scare her anymore up in the house, but in this dark she felt as if she were falling – the whole bed with the three of them on it swirling down. Also there was suddenly a rotting smell that she thought must be Rapunzel, who was buried under the clothesline tree. Was that where the air vent was? Down here, Sandy couldn't tell directions. The smell was so strong, though, that she figured the air vent must be right next to where Rapunzel was (61).

The absurdity and the grotesque of father's behaviour become greater as his family survives the confined period only thanks to mother's addiction. Since father miscalculated the amount of water for the family, the girls survive by drinking mother's whiskey and their last days in the Gothic room pass by in a drunken stupor.



In Atwood's *Surfacing*; however, the Gothic room is present only as a delusion the narrator creates herself through her madness. Her family house is empty and signifies the place of loss, the place of decay and death. The narrator feels abandoned by her parents, especially by her father. The house soon becomes a prison that the narrator traps herself in before her spiritual rebirth. From the beginning of the narrative her missing father assumes the role of the Gothic father because he "abandons" her by dying. Even in her delusion her father is a Gothic one because he judges her for her actions. In comparison to other narratives, Atwood's Gothic father is the most benign one. Nevertheless, the father takes up the Gothic form because his death instigates deep and devastating changes in the narrator's psyche. Narrator's callous ex-lover serves as a prominent example of the Gothic lover as well as the Gothic father. Atwood puts emphasis on the psychological and emotional damage he brings to the narrator because of the loss of the child he causes by making her have an abortion. Atwood takes this motif of domestic horror and replicates it in her madness. In the narrator's delusion the former lover becomes the controlling ex-husband and her aborted child transforms into a child that her husband takes away from her. Atwood conveys the narrator's experience of domestic horror caused by her non-existent Gothic husband without implying that it is all a product of narrator's madness:

I couldn't have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine; I didn't name it before it was born even, the way you're supposed to. It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a replica of himself; after it was born I was no more use. I couldn't prove it though, he was clever: he kept saying he loved me (Atwood 34).

The passage reveals the Gothic nature of her "husband", again in a form of a controlling tyrant. It also reveals the lack of freedom the narrator experiences during her "marriage" which functions as a Gothic room – a prison for her mind. The appropriation of a child from the beginning of her pregnancy, as if it is a mere thing, makes her imaginary husband also a Gothic father. In the narrator's subconscious the imagined child is a mere reflection of herself – a person with no will of her own, the Gothic husband's puppet.

All four narratives prove that the Gothic father functions as a central antagonistic figure that causes domestic horror and thus drives the plot in Southern Ontario Gothic genre.

### 2.3. The Gothic Mother, the Weakling Protagonists and the Domestic Horror

Like the Gothic father, the Gothic mother has an essential role in Southern Ontario Gothic narrative. Andrea F. Szabó identifies “the gothic mother”, along with the gothic villainess, the femme fatale and the helpless victim, as a feminine role performed by the characters in Munro’s Gothic narratives (n. pag.). Katrin Berndt also uses the term “the Gothic mother” in her analysis of Munro’s short story “The Piece of Utrecht”. Her version of “the Gothic mother” is the absent figure, “perceived by her daughters as a grotesque and monstrous creature – who has continued to haunt both their house and the town in spite of her death [...] which Munro uses to relate to the horrors of domestic life” (4). According to Berndt “the Gothic mother is both the source of the dread, and a symbol for the suppressed levels of experience” (5). In Findley’s, Atwood’s and Gowdy’s narratives, the Gothic mother is a submissive figure and as such, often an accomplice to her Gothic husband, i.e. the Gothic father. She can function as the source of dread, but she is mostly a victim of circumstances which often include some form of domestic horror. Thus, unlike the Gothic father who is a negative character, the role of the Gothic mother is ambiguous. She is often desperate and guilt-ridden because of her former actions. The remorseful Gothic mother is prone to self-destructive behaviour. Findley’s character of Mrs Noyes, Gowdy’s Mary Field, Atwood’s narrator and Munro’s characters Flo and Rose assume the role of the Gothic mother in the Southern Ontario Gothic narrative. Malin locates the source of domestic horror within the family in “relationships [which] are distorted” since “the family is suffocation itself” (8-9). There are two sources of “the suffocating families” in four narratives in question and these are the tyranny of the Gothic father and the loss of children. In Findley’s and Gowdy’s novel they cause mothers’ drinking problems and depression. In Atwood’s *Surfacing* they incite the narrator’s psychological and moral crisis. The death or loss of a child is a prominent theme that drives these narratives and Gothic mothers to blame themselves for the loss of a child. The key difference lies in the way they deal with that loss: for example, Mrs Noyes and Mary Field become alcoholics. Lindsey Michael Banco explains the use of alcoholism in Southern Gothic narratives by stating that “drunkenness remains a temptation to sin but also a necessary step in the estrangement of consciousness that leads to grace and redemption” and that “the toxicity of alcohol routinely (and for good reason) gets extended into epistemological toxicity – because we regard it warily for its power to demolish ‘perception’, ‘judgment’ [and] ‘responsibility’ (65). The Gothic mothers in question drink to forget their

despised realities and to flee from their guilt-ridden consciousness. Mrs Field chooses self-destruction because she thinks that she can only redeem herself for her son's death through her own death. Mrs Noyes and Atwood's narrator, on the other hand, redeem themselves by changing their actions. They decide to put a stop to their submissiveness and to take charge of their lives. Susan V. Donaldson characterizes Southern Gothic narratives as “uncomfortable stories precisely because they suggest a rogues [sic] gallery of women who have stepped out of line, transgressed the boundaries of their traditional roles, and served as disruptive forces in male narratives or perhaps even threatened to usurp narratives in general” (n. pag.). Because of that characteristic they shift from being the weakling protagonists to being the morally righteous heroines.

Similar to alcoholism, madness is a prominent contributor to domestic horror in Southern Gothicism. Gowdy's character of Mary Field epitomizes both features of domestic horror since she is portrayed as an alcoholic who suffers from serious mental problems. Her daughters find out by accident about their brother Jimmy and his death. Their cousin shows them the newspaper article and then goads them: “Well, anyway, it says that your mother threw the baby over Niagara Falls. *Threw* him, not dropped him. Because he would have landed on the ground if she just dropped him” (Gowdy 17, emphasis in the original). Jimmy's death explains the tragedies in the Field family. It explains mother's alcoholism and depression, and finally, her death. Gowdy announces her death by depicting a family crisis ten years prior to the fall. Mother ends up with no whiskey in the house and with one intention on her mind: “I've got to go on the roof” [...] “I have to be up high. High, high up” (28-29). The girls hold her down on the bed until she gives up her intention. In a similar episode Gowdy depicts mother's physical and mental state after spending two weeks in a hospital: “She has gone white overnight. A reaction to the anesthetic, their father explains. But the sag of her small shoulders, the grey around her eyes, the whole deleted look of her says she's suffered more than that. The girls don't ask. They don't want to know” (79). The possible clue for mother's condition arises later in the narrative, when Sandy tells her mother she is pregnant and mother responds by talking about abortion: “When you have an abortion [...] your body goes into mourning. [...] Your heart breaks. Your tear ducts won't close. Your hair follicles act up. Your hair just gives up. [...] You can't trick nature. You can't dance to the music and then kill the piper” (Gowdy 170). Mother's detailed response comes out of her personal experience, thus Gowdy uses the loss of another child as the tipping point of further deterioration of her mental health. Gowdy echoes the past events of domestic horror and

announces the future ones, thus conveying the Southern atmosphere in her novel. The family house in Gowdy's novel becomes the Southern locale filled with death. In this case death is self-inflicted. Mother climbs on the roof and then jumps but Gowdy attaches ambiguous meaning to her death. While mother's climb on the roof was intentional, one cannot claim the same for her fall. Her previous crises, her self-destructive behaviour and weak mental state, as well as the fact that she spent the entire night on the roof suggest that she was planning to jump on her own, only collecting the courage to do so. Another element that contributes to the fact that she committed suicide is the father's immediate reaction, first when his wife climbs the roof and he does not want to call the fire department and then after her falling down, when he invents the story that she was saving their non-existent cat. Father's reactions display the small town mentality and the fear of what people will say, with which Gowdy also evokes the aura of the Southern atmosphere in her novel. The Gothic mother is a contributor of domestic horror in the Field family, as Lou metaphorically describes it: "This house is like a dangerous country that is ruled by a despot and founded on an historical calamity.' The calamity is their mother, if Norma and Sandy care to ask" (Gowdy 141).

In *Surfacing* madness drives the narrative in the opposite direction – instead of self-destruction it causes recuperation, but in both cases madness is a means of redemption or at least an attempt to redeem oneself. Apart from the trauma of losing her family, especially her father, Atwood's narrator is also haunted by domestic horror from her past and the loss of a child as its consequence. As in Findley's novel, the loss of a child is directly caused by the Gothic father. Atwood introduces the scenes of domestic horror and the dysfunctional relationship with her former lover only as glimpses of narrator's memories and her delusions that echo the problems which haunt her on a subconscious level just to emerge in the form of madness. The narrator compares the domestic horror experienced in her imagined former marriage to "jumping off a cliff" which "was the feeling [she] had all the time [she] was married; in the air, going down, waiting for the smash at the bottom" (Atwood 47-48). The mental abuse at the hand of her "husband" and the act of taking her "child" only reflect how the narrator felt after the dysfunctional relationship resulting in an involuntary abortion she experienced in real life, leaving her emotionally weak and lost. The fact that she aborted a child haunts her: "I have to behave as though it doesn't exist, because for me it can't, it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled. Lapse, relapse, I have to forget" (Atwood 48). Atwood's choice of words brings to mind the images of her brother drowning, combined with

the dead animals in jars which in fact represent visions of the unborn child that still plague her mind:

it was in a bottle curled up, staring out at me like a cat pickled; it had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands, fish gills, I couldn't let it out, it was dead already, it had drowned in air. It was there when I woke up, suspended in the air above me like a chalice, an evil grail and I thought, Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allow it (Atwood 143).

The extent of the narrator's guilt and remorse is shown with juxtaposition of grotesque bodily images and motifs of life and death. Atwood conveys such imagery to describe the narrator's feelings after the abortion: "I was emptied, amputated; I stank of salt and antiseptic, they had planted death in me like a seed" (Atwood 144). The missing father and his death, the loss of family members, the loss of a child and then the loss of self and madness as its consequence make a form of a domestic horror which functions as the key narrative drive in *Surfacing*.

In Munro's stories Rose is a weakling protagonist who starts out as a victim of domestic horror in her childhood to become both a victim and a culprit of domestic horror in her marriage. In "The Beggar Maid" Munro casually reveals that the family house is once again the setting for domestic horror. It is the place of Rose's and her husband's mutual beatings and also a place of Rose's continuous unhappiness. Munro depicts Rose's experience of domestic horror in the following paragraph:

She had scars on her wrists and her body, which she had made (not quite in the most dangerous places) with a razor blade. Once in the kitchen of this house Patrick had tried to choke her. Once she had run outside and knelt in her nightgown, tearing up handfuls of grass. Yet for Anna this bloody fabric her parents had made, of mistakes and mismatches, that anybody could see ought to be torn up and thrown away, was still the true web of life, of father and mother, of beginning and shelter. What fraud, thought Rose, what fraud for everybody (167).

Being a contributor of domestic horror, and later on a missing figure in her daughter's life, Rose takes up the role of the Gothic mother. The cause of Rose's weakness lies in the lack of love from her own Gothic parents. I. Malin calls it the "disfiguring love" which

is often learned at home. Parents see themselves in their children but forget about self-expression on the part of the young; they want to mould unformed personalities. Children, on the other hand, become narcissistic because of their need to find and love themselves in a cold environment (8).

In a dysfunctional family the Gothic father is the ruler, women and children are his victims, playing the roles of weakling protagonists. Therefore, children in dysfunctional families can behave either as an echo of their father or act as his exact opposites. In *Not Wanted on the Voyage* Noah's sons Japeth and Shem act like their father's shadows, one becomes as violent as the father, both become blindly obedient lacking their own will and moral compass. The lower deck crew – Mrs Noyes and Mottyl, Emma, Ham and Lucy are the weakling protagonists as well as the morally righteous heroes because they choose to fight against the Gothic father and his old and unjust ways. In Atwood's *Surfacing* the narrator starts off being the weakling protagonist due to her obedient and submissive behaviour in her former romantic relationships and in relationship with her parents. However, the narrator decides to change her life as she states: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. (...) withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death" (Atwood 191). The narrator regains her power by losing her mind. She makes peace with herself for her former actions as the Gothic mother, thus becoming the morally righteous heroine, ready to start her life anew. In Gowdy's *Falling Angels* Mary Field, the Gothic mother, redeems herself in the only way she knows, in self-destructive behaviour which ends with her death. Through death by falling just like her son did, she restores the balance, she settles the record straight and thus becomes the morally righteous heroine. Her daughters perform the role of weakling protagonists, but only Sandy and Norma act as morally righteous heroines. From the beginning of the narrative they are portrayed as selfless and good, suffering from the lack of love in their dysfunctional family. Portrayed as cynical and sadistic, Lou remains as the one who resembles the Gothic father the most. Gowdy finishes her novel with the scene in which Lou watches a seagull flying over her father. Lou sees it as a sign from her mother, giving her a sense of comfort and a feeling of inner peace. Thus, Gowdy leaves Lou's ambiguous and restless character with the possibility of redemption. In Findley's novel Mrs Noyes is haunted with guilt and remorse because she and Noah murdered their newborn son Adam, Japeth's "ape-like" twin brother. The murder of children that are different, or as Findley puts it – "ape-like" – is an old tradition. The old ways and the importance of what will people say here function as leitmotifs that contribute to the feeling of the Southern atmosphere and also instigate the domestic horror. The feeling of hope returns to Mrs Noyes as she learns of the existence of another "ape-like" child – Emma's sister Lotte – whose parents decided to go against the old ways and to raise her with love. Mrs Noyes stops drinking, abandons the ark and goes against Noah's decisions in order to save

Lotte and bring her on board. She sees helping Lotte as a means of redemption for her past actions. However, her attempt to save Lotte from the flood ends with death. On Gothic father's orders Japeth murders "ape-like" Lotte as years ago his parents murdered his "ape-like" twin brother. And even though Mrs Noyes fails to save Lotte, she gains the role of a morally righteous heroine by discarding her submissive behaviour and by standing up to her Gothic husband Noah. After the family moves to the ark, the empty family house becomes the setting of death and decay. The grotesque is first brought to the vicinity of the house – to the yard filled with rotting animal carcasses where vulture birds take Lotte's body while drunken Mrs Noyes mourns her. She finds Lotte laid on top of carcasses with her eyes plucked. Then she brings her back to the house, sews her wounds and leaves her body in a chest filled with her best silks. The abandoned family house becomes a tomb right next to the graveyard of animal carcasses, thus completing Findley's grotesque vision of death and decay.

In Findley's, Atwood's, Gowdy's and Munro's narratives the Gothic mother is a submissive figure and an accomplice to the Gothic father. Gothic mothers in question are women of weak mental state, emotionally insecure, guilt-ridden and prone to self-destructive behaviour. As such they all assume the role of weakling protagonists. Their children are victims of domestic horror which makes them weakling protagonists as well. However, at times, the Gothic mother as well as her children can transgress the boundaries of patriarchal society and change their suffering status. Thus, they can shift from being weakling protagonists to being morally righteous heroes.

#### 2.4. Southern Ontario Gothic Stock Characters and the Grotesque

The grotesque has a prominent role in the creation of Southern Ontario Gothic characters, especially in the portrayal of those who are different from the rest of the society. Flannery O'Connor depicts numerous grotesque characters, members of the other, in her literary works. In the essay "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" (1960) O'Connor calls these characters "freaks" and she explains the source of the Southern Gothic "tendency toward the grotesque" by stating that

every writer, when he speaks of his own approach to fiction, hopes to show that, in some crucial and deep sense, he is a realist; and for some of us, for whom the ordinary aspects of daily life prove to be of no great fictional interest, this is very difficult. I have found that if

one's young hero can't be identified with the average American boy, or even with the average American delinquent, then his perpetrator will have a good deal of explaining to do (n.pag.).

It seems that even the author who writes about the other has a problem with readers who have issues with dealing with various forms of otherness. Delma Eugene Presley provides a possible answer to this phenomenon by stating that “the function of distortion in Southern grotesque is essentially moral in nature; this mode presents simultaneously an image of man’s incompleteness and an understanding of what he ought to be (40). Sarah Gleeson-White defines the characters of the other as either physically or mentally deformed and “ubiquitous in southern fiction” as one can find various instances in literary works of prominent Southern Gothicists such as Faulkner, O’Connor, McCullers or Capote (110). In this character type Gleeson-White recognizes the connection between Southern Gothicism and grotesque as she notices that “this collection of outsiders – whose ‘difference’ spectacularly appears on the body [...] invites the classification of much southern literature as grotesque” (110). This claim affirms the grotesque as a crucial factor in rendering Southern Ontario Gothic and Southern Gothic characters. Barbara Gabriel notices the same characteristic in Southern Ontario Gothic in the analysis of Findley’s novel *The Last of the Crazy People* in which she recognizes a “narrative about our fear of monsters – those liminal figures of representation who challenge accepted categories in discrete historical moments” (n. pag.). Lorna Hutchison also offers the explanation of the effect that grotesque narratives have on the reader by stating that “something within the grotesque aesthetic reaches in and strokes a sense within readers that alerts us to the prospect of violence, the danger of the unknown and of our curiosity toward what is both bizarre and inexplicable” (190).

Like American Southern Gothicists, Munro excels in enumerating offbeat characters, most prominently in her subplot storytelling. They represent the other of a small town Hanratty, Ontario. First such character is Becky Tyde, described in “Royal Beatings” in the following way:

She was a big-headed dwarf, with a mascot’s sexless swagger, a red velvet tam, a twisted neck that forced her to hold her head on one side, always looking up and sideways. [...] Rose watched her shoes, being scared of the rest of her, of her laugh and her neck. She knew from Flo that Becky Tyde had been sick with polio as a child, that was why her neck was twisted and why she had not grown any taller. It was hard to believe that she had started out differently, that she had ever been normal (7).



Munro's description of Becky Tyde sums up the definition of the other as she enumerates the details of her appearance, the genesis of her strangeness and the feelings her otherness instigates in those that are "normal". In short, the definition of the other includes everything that is opposite of "normal", that is, what the majority perceives as normal. The Southern Ontario Gothic writers do not attach the meaning of the other only to physical traits of the characters. They extend its meaning to their actions and to the events that include them. Thus, Becky Tyde is not only a dwarf with a twisted neck, but she is also a victim of domestic horror.

Findley also correlates domestic horror with the members of the other as its primary victims. The most prominent and the most tragic figures – the representatives of the other in his narrative are the "ape-like" children: Adam, Lotte and Hannah's baby. Their otherness encompasses both physical and mental disability. In Findley's narrative such characters are "punished" by death. Adam and Lotte are murdered by their family members and Hannah's child is stillborn. Findley emphasizes the use of grotesque in their portrayals by describing their otherness only in their deaths and in the reaction of those close to them. Findley depicts Lotte's "long furry arms" in the scene in which Mrs Noyes finds her body on the pile of animal carcasses (177) and conveys baby's otherness in the scene of Hannah looking at it for the first time:

And when Hannah finally saw her child, she screamed – though not because it was dead. Its death had long been known [...] But nothing had prepared her for the shock of seeing what she had carried all those months – nothing, for the horror of what it was in which she had invested all her ambition and all her secret love. Noah was determined, of course, that the child's deformity was her responsibility alone (341).

Hannah's negative reaction with no traces of motherly love only adds up to the picture of how society reacts to the other. Her reaction is complete when she holds the baby and caresses its back "as though it might have been human" and then throws its body in the water (Findley 345). Acting as Noah's accomplice and a mother who discards her child she is both the weakling protagonist and the Gothic mother in Findley's narrative.

Mentally disabled and loose women function as subgroups of the other in Southern Gothic genres. These categories are shaped by the behaviour of the characters, but also by the unfortunate circumstances that surround them. An example of one such character, a representative of both categories, is Franny McGill. Munro depicts her in "Privilege" as a

victim of the society, a “product” of the ones that have been taking advantage of her instead of taking care of her:

She may not have been stupid as everybody thought, but simply stunned, bewildered, by continual assault. [...] The use Shortie was making of her, that others made, would continue. She would get pregnant, be taken away, come back and get pregnant again, be taken away, come back, get pregnant, be taken away again. There would be talk of getting her sterilized, getting the Lions Club to pay for it, there would be talk of shutting her up, when she died suddenly of pneumonia, solving the problem (32).

Franny McGill serves as a good example of how society treats the other, with emphasis on those who cannot take care of themselves. Those characters present a problem which society will either choose to solve or discard. As seen in the case of Franny McGill – her mental disability is a consequence of domestic horror and her sexually free behaviour is not a product of her will, but something that was violently inflicted on her, thus unjustifiably putting her in the category of loose women in the eyes of the society. The character of Ruby Carruthers, on the other hand, can be easily labelled as a loose woman. Munro describes her in “Half a Grapefruit” as “a slutty sort of a girl, a red head with a bad squint” (49). Ruby is the protagonist of the story Rose brings home to Flo in which she is described as a sexually promiscuous girl who has sex with two boys in a row, thinking that it is the same boy the entire time, as a prank boys pull on her. The society’s reaction to Ruby is also a factor that puts her in the category of the other as Munro displays it in the following words: “It was the fashion, if you picked up any of Ruby’s things, by mistake, particularly her gym suit or her running shoes, to go and wash your hands, so you wouldn’t risk getting V.D.” (51).

One can distinguish two types of loose women in these narratives; either they belong to the other because of their lewd behaviour or because society perceives them as such. In Gowdy’s *Falling Angels* Sandy and Sherry match the description of this category. Gowdy introduces Sandy’s promiscuity at the age of sixteen with the opening sentence of the chapter entitled “Mortified by Desire”: “Sandy goes out with lots of boys, almost any boy who asks her” (91). Similarly to Ruby Carruthers, Sandy is not sure which boy she goes out with. She soon moves from dating boys her own age to older men that she meets at motels. Gowdy portrays Sandy by focusing on her fears – fear of her father, fear that people will think that she is a lesbian or a slut. Because of the lack of love in her dysfunctional family, Sandy seeks a replacement for that love in sexual relationships with various men, but they only bring her feelings of guilt and dread. Again, domestic horror lies at the core of her problematic

behaviour which labels Sandy as a member of the other. Lou's friend Sherry, who is labelled at school as "a nymphomaniac for sleeping with guys she doesn't know" (Gowdy 125), feels no remorse when she seduces Lou's boyfriend right in front of her. Later she confesses to sleeping with him and apologizes to Lou by saying that she would not do it again if she was paid to. But her remorse only lies in the fact that she had "a lousy time" with him (Gowdy 162).

The female protagonists of Atwood's *Surfacing* and Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* also fit the label of loose women, but only from their parents' perspective. The patriarchal small town mentality is often prone to labelling women as loose. Their parents' reactions serve as a good example of the importance of what other people will say, a prominent characteristic of Southern community. In *Surfacing* the small town mentality reflects itself even in the narrator's delusions. In her madness the narrator imagines that her parents do not forgive her for giving up her "marriage" and "a child" because the patriarchal way of thinking does not allow such line of thought. She is even concerned with what she will say to their neighbours if they ask her about "her husband and child". The power of the Southern Ontario community and its small town mentality is such that it troubles the characters on a subconscious level as well.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Rose is not openly judged for her change of lovers but for her bare-breasted appearance on the national television. Munro encompasses the essence of the small town mentality in Flo's reaction to her stepdaughter's performance in the following lines: "Flo took to pen and paper over that, forced her stiff swollen fingers, crippled almost out of use with arthritis, to write the word *Shame*. She wrote that if Rose's father had not been dead long ago he would now wish that he was. That was true" (Munro 230, emphasis in the original). Rose then reads Flo's letter to her friends only to conclude that most of them "could lay claim to being disowned or prayed for, in some disappointed home" (230). Munro implies that actors and artists are also members of the other, often misunderstood in their small-town communities, just like Rose is misunderstood by Flo. Milton Homer is another representative of the other in Hanratty. Munro puts the emphasis on his behaviour rather than his physical appearance. He is portrayed as a town's fool who performs two "public functions" – he "baptizes" town's newborn children and marches in parades. He visits newborn children and with a theatrical stammer delivers a speech similar to baptism which results in townsfolk mimicking him and mocking him. Even in his love of parades Munro reassures his otherness as she depicts the townsfolk ways: "One of the most derogatory things that could be said about anyone in Hanratty was that he or she was fond of parading around" (237). The

grotesque in his portrayal culminates in his proneness to public masturbation – another habit that confirms him as the town’s “other”. His peculiar behaviour, a consequence of the condition that Rose depicts as lacking “whatever it is that ordinary people lose when they are drunk” (Munro 240) results in people avoiding him, women and children crossing the street when they see him coming their way. Munro extends the grotesque of the town’s other by mirroring the role of Milton Homer on another character – Ralph Gillespie. Ralph Gillespie is known for his imitations of Milton Homer, but he ends up losing the line between what is appropriate and what is not thus becoming another member of the other.

In Atwood’s *Surfacing* the most prominent example of the other is the narrator. From the beginning of her Gothic journey to the old family house, the narrator starts to dissociate herself from her company. She feels that she is different and that her lover Joe and their friends David and Anna cannot understand her. Their lack of understanding escalates when they interpret the narrator’s reaction to her father’s death as devoid of any emotion. The narrator notices their reaction to her otherness and also explains it in the following way: “Their voices murmur, they can't discuss me, they know I'm listening; they're avoiding me, they find me inappropriate; they think I should be filled with death, I should be in mourning. But nothing has died, everything is alive, everything is waiting to become alive” (Atwood 159). With this part Atwood announces the beginning of the narrator's true form of otherness – her madness. At the peak of her madness she dissociates herself completely from her present company and escapes into wilderness. She hides from Joe and men who are searching for her as if she were a hunted animal, as Atwood depicts it in the following lines: “I count them, making sure, five. That is the way they are, they will not let you have peace, they don't want you to have anything they don't have themselves. I stay on the bank, resting, licking the scratches; no fur yet on my skin, it's too early” (Atwood 185-186). Through her madness the narrator detaches herself physically and mentally from “them” – her hunters – and thus fully claims her otherness.

There are also a couple of minor characters that assume the role of the other in *Surfacing*. One such character is the old woman Madame. Atwood focuses on a small detail, on the fact that Madame is missing a hand and builds on it an absurdly grotesque vision depicting her in the following way: “her main source of power was that she had only one hand. Her other arm ended in a soft pink snout like an elephant's trunk” (27). Equally peculiar and grotesque is narrator's reaction to the memory of her, focusing on her arm, “miraculous in an unspecified way like the toes of saints or the cut-off pieces of early martyrs” (27). In Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* the most prominent members of the other are the animals. They

communicate with people and with each other, they have friends and worry for their children. But despite their uniqueness and their abilities they are used, abused, sacrificed and killed off mercilessly. In the treatment of the animals in his novel, Findley casts an image of the way humanity treated the members of the other throughout history. His writing is reminiscent of how Native Americans, African-Americans, Jews, women, members of minorities and those who are different from the rest were treated in the past and how they are being treated now. The character who personifies all the aforementioned groups is Mottyl, Mrs Noyes's cat. Mottyl is old and physically impaired – blind, sick and pregnant, but not by her choice. She and her children are abused in Dr. Noyes' monstrous experiments. Thus, as an impaired, oppressed and feminine figure of different species Mottyl is on all accounts a member of the other.

Another representative of the other in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is Japeth, Noah's blue-skinned son. Findley here uses another metaphor to deal with the wounds of humanity and in this case he tackles the issue of racism, quite literally. In Lucy's character one can notice several dualities based on her origin, her gender and her sexual orientation. Lucy/Lucifer is an angel pretending to be a woman. Since she is an angel one can only decipher her sex as male on account of her masculine name. Lucy, the transvestite, marries a man, thus affirming her role as a queer figure, i.e. the member of the other. Lucy is the most conspicuous figure in the battle against patriarchal system which suppresses all who belong to the other in Findley's narrative. Barbara Gabriel states that “it is the figure of the monstrous as stigmatized body that grounds homologues of queerness, difference, imperfection, and madness throughout Findley's fiction, their shared status as terms of exclusion within a patriarchal sign system” (n.pag.). David Jefferess sees Lucy's otherness and her fondness for things that are different as the main cause for her flight from heaven as he notices that “Lucy is stifled by the monotony of heaven; she desires difference where difference is not tolerated” (n.pag.). In Gowdy's narrative Norma is the representative of the other on account of her sexual orientation. Norma's otherness is fully disclosed in the episode in which she starts kissing her best friend Stella, who doesn't know Norma is a lesbian. Stella's response to Norma's coming out as a lesbian represents the typical reaction of the society towards the other:

“Stop it!” she screams. Stella is now standing in front of Norma, violently shaking her head. Her long hair whipping reminds Norma of the night that they did the shimmy. “That's

terrible!” Stella cries. “It’s sick. Why did you *do* it?” “I guess I wanted to’ Norma says with a serenity that she wonders at herself (Gowdy 184, emphasis in the original).

Stella’s negative reaction is an expected reaction to the other in the Southern Ontario Gothic narrative. Her last words to Norma are emblematic for a small town mentality as she ends their friendship by saying: “I won’t tell anybody” (Gowdy 185). Her last remark reflects the fear of what people will say and how they will react to Norma’s otherness thus conveying the Southern atmosphere in *Falling Angels*.

As seen from aforementioned examples Findley, Atwood, Gowdy and Munro create an entire set of offbeat characters. These characters differ from the rest of the society on account of their beliefs, their mental state, their physical appearance, their handicap, their addiction, their unusual behaviour, their sexual orientation and their gender. To create such characters – the members of the other – the writers in question heavily rely on the grotesque mode. The otherness and the grotesque are not only reserved for secondary characters since all four Southern Ontario Gothic narratives in question have protagonists that are likewise members of the other.

## 2.5. The Themes of Righteousness and Sin: Religious Fanaticism, Unique Mythologies, Psychological and Moral Crisis of the Individual

Findley, Atwood, Gowdy and Munro apply in various degrees themes of righteousness and sin to guide their narratives. These are the themes that deal with moral issues; with the difference between good and evil, right and wrong and which reveal the hypocrisy of the society and/or the individual. Themes of righteousness and sin – unique mythologies/religion, religious fanaticism and the crisis/catharsis of the individual – are usually interconnected but can function independently in the narrative. Mythology as a thematic concept may rely on a concrete religion or on a newly invented system of belief. The downfall of a religious system or the creation of a new one is used as a means of instigating either the spiritual, psychological and moral crisis or catharsis of the character. Shelley Kulperger expounds this use of religious concepts and mythologies by claiming that:

the merger of the real with the otherworldly, the mundane with the supernatural, the material with the immaterial, the familiar with the unfamiliar, and the domestic with violence – is key

to making concrete what otherwise remains private, personal, repressed, or trivialized. Such refractions of the uncanny – the strange made familiar and the familiar made strange – are intricately hinged to the material world (98).

Thus, in order to expose what is hidden in characters' subconscious, Southern Ontario Gothic authors in question reach for themes of righteousness and sin. Their characters have to satisfy two conditions in order to experience spiritual crisis or catharsis: they have to act like religious fanatics and have to have a system of belief to perform their fanaticism. The character-religious fanatic usually judges others and decides who is righteous and who is full of sin, although at times the entire Southern community can take over the role of the judge. The psychological crisis emerges in the form of madness, while moral crisis comes as a consequence of sin, i.e. it ensues because of a character's guilty conscience. Findley and Gowdy both use Christianity as a foundation for religious fanaticism in their novels. Noah's blind belief in God functions as the main incentive for mayhem and injustice in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. God, Yaweh is present in his physical form but he is far from one's idealized image of god. By taking over a Biblical story of Noah's Ark and rewriting it based on the Southern Ontario Gothic constructive elements, Findley questions the existent religious system and underlines the moral hypocrisy of both the society and the individual. He does so by shifting the traditionally perceived roles of good and evil in the writing of his characters. Thus Findley portrays God and Biblical characters devoted to him, which are traditionally perceived as good, as morally dubious and evil. On the other hand, the misfits who do not believe in God and characters such as Lucifer which are traditionally perceived as evil, Findley portrays as good and morally righteous. All Noah's wrong doing stems out of his religious fanaticism. The grotesque behind Noah's actions culminates with the division of his family into two classes, into Noah's patriarchal and dogmatic evil upper-deck crew of blind believers and Mrs Noyes's moral lower-deck crew of atheists who want changes. To make a greater distinction between good and evil, Findley portrays his characters according to the Christian concepts of seven deadly sins and the seven virtues. Wrath, lust, pride, envy, gluttony, greed and sloth are reserved for Noah and the upper-deck crew, while chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility are the characteristics of the lower-deck characters as well as the animals. Thus Findley portrays Mottyl, the cat, as Noah's exact opposite – good, righteous and capable of feeling love and compassion. She experiences great sadness for the loss of her children, her friends and animals sacrificed by Noah and even shows compassion towards her enemies. Noah and the upper-deck crew are the ones that are

immoral, cruel and capable of killing without remorse. Mrs Noyes recognizes their cruelty as “fear in disguise and nothing more” and notices: “And hadn't one of Japeth's holy strangers said that fear itself was nothing more than a failure of the imagination?” (Findley 252). These definitions of cruelty and fear explain the upper-deck crew's actions since those who believe seem to be the most fearful. It is the fear of something different, the fear of other, that instigates the most brutal violence in Findley's narrative. Without the physical presence of God, Noah's faith begins to falter during the voyage on the ark. He finds no sign from Yaweh, only Mottyl's dead kitten he misinterprets as a sign from God. But God is dead: there is no more magic, no sheep singing, no more unicorns and no land to be found. Noah's spiritual crisis seems to lead to the suppression of terror and domestic horror between the two warring groups of Noyeses so Findley's novel ends with peace and tolerance between family members.

In her narrative Gowdy also creates a religious system based on Christianity. In *Falling Angels* Norma is the religious fanatic. She is overwhelmed with the burden and responsibility of being the oldest child in a dysfunctional family. As a consequence of too much responsibility she fails one grade. She has problems with other children at school because of her weight issues. Her fanaticism emerges after she finds out that she had a baby brother who died. First she starts imagining what he would look like if he was alive and compares him with religious figures: “She imagined him striding home and keeping their mother off the roof with gentle words. What their brother, Jimmy would have been, she thought, big and brave and gentle as the lamb of God” (Gowdy 31). Norma imagines him as a saintly and heroic figure “full of grace”, and soon starts talking to him on a daily basis, praying for his help (40). At the basis of the newly established faith in her brother lies a profound Christian faith, especially in Jesus Christ whom she starts identifying with her brother Jimmy, as Gowdy indicates in the episode of family's imprisonment in father's bunker in which Norma thinks she is dying:

To prepare herself for heaven, she had enumerated her sins and asked God's forgiveness. She had conceived a love for Jesus so profound that often during the day she hallucinated harp music and saw the Star of Betlehem blazing clear. She got the idea that their dead brother sat on the right hand of Jesus, and she carried on long, one-sided conversations with him. From where he sat, he could see the whole world, she imagined (71).

The peak of her religious fanaticism is conveyed through her conversations with Jimmy, i.e. through her talking to herself. Her grotesque behaviour is the symptom of a deep inner unrest and unhappiness which are caused by the lack of love and understanding in her family.



Norma's religious fanaticism fulfils its function of an escape from the despised reality. Gilbert H. Muller notices similar behaviour of characters in Flannery O'Connor's fiction and also connects such characters' actions with the grotesque as he claims the following:

The typical grotesque character in Miss O'Connor's fiction is an individual who projects certain extreme mental states which, while psychologically valid, are not investigations in the tradition of psychological realism. To be certain, the reality of the unconscious life incorporating dream, fantasy, and hallucination — is expressed, but grotesque characterization is not interested in the subtleties of emotion and feeling, but rather in their larger outlines (179).

In Norma's case, the larger outline is marked by the unsolvable problem of her living in a dysfunctional family filled with domestic horror. Despite all of her kindness and love for her family, she cannot help them. Because of her childish form of religious fanaticism, Norma truly functions as a grotesque character until the point when she realizes that she is talking to herself. However, Norma's religious fanaticism is not a form of madness, or schizophrenia, like Lou suggests, but a coping mechanism of a child living in an environment marked with domestic horror. In *Surfacing* Atwood produces a unique religious system as a means of enacting narrator's madness. Atwood gradually reveals the narrator's feelings towards religion. Christianity functions as a foreign concept to her, as she depicts the crucifix by the road the narrator passes, as “a wooden Christ, ribs sticking out, the alien god, mysterious to [her] as ever” (14). Later, the narrator depicts how she learned about religion by other children at school:

They terrified me by telling me there was a dead man in the sky watching everything I did and I retaliated by explaining where babies came from. Some of their mothers phoned mine to complain, though I think I was more upset than they were: they didn't believe me but I believed them (Atwood 45).

With such statements Atwood provides the insight into the narrator's complex relationship with Christian religion and offers an explanation for her need to invent a new system of belief. The narrator creates a unique mythology comprised of animism or a similar concept one can compare to Native American religious practices. Her new religion is deeply spiritual and personal. Narrator's parents are also included in it as her spiritual guides that leave gifts for her: father's gifts are the Indian rock paintings depicting creatures he copied in his drawings and mother's gift is a scrapbook with her childhood drawings – which she believes will teach

her not only “how to see but how to act” (Atwood 92). She partly constructs her religion based on the creatures on her father's “magic” drawings as she assigns to them specific spiritual meaning by stating that

The Indians did not own salvation but they had once known where it lived and their signs marked the sacred places, the places where you could learn the truth. There was no painting at White Birch Lake and none here, because his later drawings weren't copied from things on the rocks. He had discovered new places, new oracles, they were things he was seeing the way I had seen, true vision; at the end, after the failure of logic. When it happened the first time he must have been terrified, it would be like stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy, purple trees and red moons and a green sun (Atwood 145).

The drawings function as a basis for her new religion but they are also a trigger to her madness. Thus, the narrator's religion is a form of madness “performed” through religious fanaticism. The use of mythology, the religious fanaticism and madness in Southern Ontario Gothic narratives can be explained with K. Berndt's definition of “the Gothic mode” which addresses “the indeterminate, obscure, and subconscious spheres of life. It stresses the hidden, ambivalent meanings, expresses fears beyond logic and rational understanding, and reminds its readers that such anxieties may lurk beneath the surface of everyday, ordinary experience” (3). In other words, the role of unique mythologies and religious fanaticism is to bring to the surface all the hidden emotions and moral issues that the Southern Ontario Gothic characters struggle with. Her madness as loss of control marks the beginning of the healing process with which the narrator regains her “self”. Peter Klovan explains the reasons for the narrator’s psychological crisis and for creation of her unique system of belief:

God, father, and mother are dead, leaving her rootless in a world deprived of faith, reason, and love. Perceiving herself as a mutilated victim surrounded by killer “Americans”, ubiquitous and all powerful, the narrator clearly needs a radical transformation of self [...] Civilization having failed her, the narrator looks elsewhere for the necessary knowledge, and finds it in the magical realms of fairy tales, Indian mythology, and childhood fantasy (n. pag.).

Despite being the estranged daughter the narrator is left deeply troubled with the deaths of her parents and subconsciously she blames herself for the loss of her child. But mostly she is troubled because of the wrong choices she made in her life, that is, the choices that others made for her. Atwood depicts the reality slipping away from the narrator as readers follow her thoughts:

I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they are my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it, the ones who could help are gone (Atwood 73).

The religious fanaticism and madness, are connected to the narrator's family, to the burden and regret because she failed to stand up for herself and her child.

P. D. Bailey claims that “Southern Gothic literature is characterized by obsessive preoccupations – with blood, family, and inheritance; racial, gender, and/or class identities; the Christian religion (typically, in its most “fundamentalist” forms); and home – and a compulsion to talk (or write) about these preoccupations” and that is why Southern Gothic narratives are “fueled by the need to explain and/or understand foundational trauma, the violation or loss of that which is essential to identity and survival but often irretrievable” (271). The four narratives in question prove that Southern Ontario Gothic deals with the same preoccupations. Findley, Gowdy and Atwood all apply religious fanaticism and madness in their novels in order to reveal and explain the larger outline – the trauma of an individual or wounds of society. Unlike the aforementioned authors, Munro does not apply the religious fanaticism in her short stories, instead she relies on the concept of story-telling, on the compulsion to talk about blood, family, gender and identity. With Flo's and Rose's story-telling Munro deals with moral issues and hypocrisy in Southern Ontario community. The story-teller acts like a judge in her narrative, a replacement of the religious fanatic.

### III. Conclusion

Southern Ontario Gothic is as an independent genre that can be compared to the American Southern Gothic since both genres share the same narrative constructs. By analyzing four Southern Ontario Gothic narratives: Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) and Barbara Gowdy's *Falling Angels* (1989) the thesis exemplifies the constructive elements of the Southern Ontario Gothic and the Southern Gothic, i.e. the Southern Gothics.

The constructive elements which build the framework of the Southern Ontario Gothic encompass the specific haunted setting, stock characters, themes of domestic horror and/or themes of righteousness and sin and they are all accompanied with the extensive use of grotesque. The haunted setting is comprised of typical Southern setting: the family house, the small Southern town, the road/the journey, the woods and the Gothic water. The Southern locales are immersed in the specific Southern atmosphere that writers create by generating the feelings of dread and inner unrest, by displaying images of decay and degeneration and by bringing to the fore the small town mentality. All Southern Gothic narratives include stock characters – the outcasts and misfits, i.e. the members of the other and all those that are different from what society perceives as normal. The characters usually assume several key roles: they can perform the roles of the Gothic father or the Gothic husband/lover, the Gothic mother, the weakling protagonist and the morally righteous hero or heroine. Two types of themes rule the Southern Ontario Gothic narratives. The themes of domestic horror deal with dysfunctional families filled with violence and abuse. Themes of righteousness and sin include the moral issues dealing with dichotomies such as right and wrong and good and evil. These themes are usually displayed through unique mythology or a system of belief and the character's religious fanaticism, through psychological or moral crisis of the individual and through characters' otherness. There are themes that can function within both categories and they include journey, death, murder, suicide, crime, rape and sexual deviancy. The prerequisite for the Southern Ontario Gothic narrative is that it has to be constructed from at least one element from each category, including the all-encompassing presence of the grotesque. The four aforementioned narratives prove the construction of the Southern Ontario Gothic based on these elements and show extensive possibilities of their incorporation in various types of narratives.

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## Abstract

The thesis offers the definition of the Southern Ontario Gothic as a genre by exemplifying its narrative constructs in three novels: Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), Barbara Gowdy's *Falling Angels* (1989) and a collection of short stories – Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978). The framework of the Southern Ontario Gothic is set in comparison with the American Southern Gothic, showing that these two independent Gothic subgenres share the same narrative constructs. The thesis also deals with the problematic behind defining these Gothic subgenres and supports the notion that Canadian Southern Ontario Gothic and the American Southern Gothic, despite being two separate genres, share all features of Southern Gothicism. Because of that the thesis supports the idea of Southern Gothicism as an umbrella term for the Southern Ontario Gothic and the Southern Gothic, i.e. the term that transgresses the boundaries of one genre (the American Southern Gothic). The term “the Southern Gothics” has been coined for the purpose of this thesis and refers to both genres together with their common features. Consequently, the Southern Ontario Gothic narrative constructs, exemplified and analyzed in the four narratives in question, are based on the Canadian literary theory as well as the American Southern Gothic literary practice. The constructive elements which build the framework of the Southern Ontario Gothic encompass the specific haunted setting which is comprised of typical Southern locales immersed in the distinct Southern atmosphere. Southern Ontario Gothic narratives’ stock characters are portrayed as other, as different from the rest of society. Moreover, the Southern Ontario Gothic characters assume four crucial roles: that of the Gothic father, Gothic mother, weakling protagonist and morally righteous hero or heroine. The analyzed narratives also share common themes: themes of domestic horror and themes of righteousness and sin. All categories in Southern Ontario Gothic framework are accompanied with the extensive use of grotesque. The conclusion of the thesis is that Southern Ontario Gothic exists as an independent genre with its fully developed constructive elements.

**Key words:** Southern Ontario Gothic, Canadian Gothic, Southern Gothic, grotesque, the other