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### **POETIC FEATURES OF AMERICAN GOTHIC WORKS OF THE XX-XXI CENTURIES**

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#### **Annotation:**

This article examines the principal poetic features that define American Gothic literature from the twentieth century to the present day. Drawing on established scholarly frameworks by David Punter, Leslie Fiedler, Teresa Goddu, and Allan Lloyd-Smith, the study identifies key narrative strategies including the uncanny doubling of characters, the symbolic encoding of national trauma, spatial liminality, and the subversion of domestic space that distinguish American Gothic from its European predecessor. Particular attention is given to how contemporary authors such as Toni Morrison, Cormac McCarthy, Shirley Jackson, and Carmen Maria Machado have expanded the genre's poetic repertoire through polyphonic narration, unreliable focalization, and the aestheticization of bodily horror. The article concludes that the enduring vitality of American Gothic lies in its capacity to transform collective anxieties into compelling literary form.

**Keywords:** American Gothic, poetic features, uncanny, narrative strategies, spatial liminality, national trauma, contemporary fiction.

#### **Аннотация:**

в данной статье рассматриваются основные поэтические особенности американской готической литературы XX-XXI веков. На основе трудов Дэвида Пантера, Лесли Фидлера, Терезы Годду и Аллана Ллойд-Смита



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выявлены ключевые нарративные стратегии: двойничество, символическое кодирование национальной травмы, пространственная лиминальность и субверсия домашнего пространства. Особое внимание уделяется современным авторам, расширяющим поэтический арсенал жанра через полифоническую нарратацию и эстетизацию телесного ужаса.

**Ключевые слова:** американская готика, поэтические особенности, сверхъестественное, нарративные стратегии, пространственная лиминальность, национальная травма, современная проза.

### **Annotatsiya:**

ushbu maqolada XX-XXI asr Amerika gotik adabiyotining asosiy poetik xususiyatlari tadqiq etiladi. Devid Panter, Lesli Fidler, Tereza Goddu va Allan Lloyd-Smit kabi olimlarning ilmiy ishlari asosida asosiy narrativ strategiyalar g'ayritabiiy ikkilanish, milliy travmaning ramziy kodlanishi, fazoviy liminallik va uy-joy fazosining subversiyasi aniqlangan. Maqolada Toni Morrison, Kormak Makkarti, Shirli Jekson va Karmen Mariya Machado kabi zamonaviy mualliflarning polifonik narratsiya va tanaga doir dahshat estetikasi orqali janrning poetik arsenalini kengaytirganligi ko'rsatilgan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Amerika gotikasi, poetik xususiyatlar, g'ayritabiiylik, narrativ strategiyalar, fazoviy liminallik, milliy travma, zamonaviy adabiyot.

The Gothic tradition, which originated in the ruins and castles of eighteenth-century England, underwent a profound transformation when it crossed the Atlantic Ocean. American writers discovered that the genre's essential machinery dread, transgression, the return of the repressed could be recalibrated to address



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the particular anxieties of the New World.<sup>1</sup> Leslie Fiedler, in his landmark study, argued that American fiction is, at its core, a Gothic enterprise, driven by the unresolved tensions between innocence and guilt, wilderness and civilization.<sup>2</sup> This article aims to identify and analyze the principal poetic features understood here as the formal, structural, and stylistic devices that define the American Gothic from the twentieth century onward. The investigation draws upon established critical frameworks while attending to the innovations introduced by contemporary practitioners of the genre.

Perhaps the most persistent poetic feature of American Gothic is the figure of the double, or the *Doppelgänger*, which serves as a vehicle for exploring fractured identity. Allan Lloyd-Smith, in his comprehensive introduction to the genre, traces how the double functions as both a psychological and a cultural motif in American fiction, reflecting the nation's deep ambivalence about selfhood and alterity.<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century, this device achieves particular intensity in the works of writers like Flannery O'Connor, whose grotesque characters externalize the moral contradictions of the American South. Shirley Jackson's "The Haunting of Hill House" (1959) deploys the double through the protagonist Eleanor Vance, whose gradual dissolution of selfhood mirrors the house's own malevolent architecture. The uncanny effect, as theorized by Freud and adapted by Gothic scholars, operates here through a deliberate blurring of boundaries between the familiar and the strange, rendering domestic space itself a source of terror.<sup>4</sup>

A second defining feature of American Gothic poetics is its capacity to encode historical trauma within narrative form. Teresa Goddu has compellingly argued that American Gothic is not merely a literary style but a mode of national self-

<sup>1</sup>Punter D. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. Vol. 2. - London: Longman, 1996. - 17 p.

<sup>2</sup>Fiedler L. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. - New York: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960. - 128 p.

<sup>3</sup>Lloyd-Smith A. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. - New York: Continuum, 2004. - 18 p.

<sup>4</sup>Hogle J.E. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. - 187 p.



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examination, one that confronts the repressed horrors of slavery, genocide, and systemic violence.<sup>5</sup> Toni Morrison's "Beloved" (1987) stands as the paradigmatic text in this regard: the ghostly figure of the murdered child becomes the embodiment of collective memory, a spectral presence that refuses to be silenced. Morrison herself, in her critical study, explored how the "African American presence" constitutes an essential, though often unacknowledged, dimension of the American literary imagination.<sup>6</sup> This symbolic encoding of trauma extends to other contexts as well. Cormac McCarthy's "Blood Meridian" (1985) transforms the historical violence of westward expansion into a kind of apocalyptic sublime, where the landscape itself becomes a character drenched in blood and metaphysical dread. Eric Savoy has noted that the American Gothic persistently returns to the national past not to resolve its contradictions but to keep them unsettlingly alive.<sup>7</sup>

The poetics of space constitutes a third essential feature. Unlike European Gothic, which relies heavily on medieval architectural settings, American Gothic locates its terrors in characteristically national spaces: the frontier, the plantation, the suburban home, the small town. Charles Crow's edited volume emphasizes how these spaces function as liminal zones thresholds between the known and the unknown where normative social structures dissolve.<sup>8</sup> Shirley Jackson's "We Have Always Lived in the Castle" (1962) transforms the family home into a fortress of exclusion and paranoia. In the twenty-first century, this spatial subversion has grown more sophisticated. Carmen Maria Machado's "Her Body and Other Parties" (2017) reimagines domestic and bodily spaces as sites of

<sup>5</sup>Goddu T.A. Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation. - New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. - 24 p.

<sup>6</sup>Morrison T. Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. - Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992. - 45 p.

<sup>7</sup>Savoy E. The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic // American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative. Ed. by R.K. Martin and E. Savoy. - Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998. - 18 p.

<sup>8</sup>Crow C.L. (ed.). A Companion to American Gothic. - Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. - 15 p.



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gendered horror, where the female body itself becomes the Gothic architecture.<sup>9</sup> Fred Botting observes that contemporary Gothic increasingly dissolves the boundaries between interior psychological states and exterior spatial forms, creating what might be called an architecture of affect.<sup>10</sup>

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also witnessed significant innovation in Gothic narrative technique. The traditional first-person confessional mode, inherited from Poe and his predecessors, has been supplemented by polyphonic narration, fragmented chronology, and unreliable focalization. Gina Wisker argues that contemporary women's Gothic fiction, in particular, employs these techniques to challenge patriarchal narrative authority and to give voice to experiences that conventional realism cannot adequately represent.<sup>11</sup> V.E. Vatsuro (В.Э. Вацуро), in his study of the Gothic novel's reception in Russia, noted the genre's remarkable adaptability across cultural contexts, an observation equally applicable to the American tradition's capacity for perpetual self-reinvention.<sup>12</sup> The aestheticization of bodily horror represents another key development. Where earlier Gothic fiction often relied on suggestion and atmospheric dread, contemporary works by Machado, Paul Tremblay, and others foreground the body as a site of transformation and dissolution. This corporeal turn reflects broader cultural anxieties about identity, consent, and the integrity of the self in an age of technological and political upheaval.

The poetic features of American Gothic literature the uncanny double, the symbolic encoding of national trauma, spatial liminality, and narrative innovation constitute a coherent yet evolving system of literary devices. From the mid-twentieth-century works of Shirley Jackson and Flannery O'Connor to the radical

<sup>9</sup>Machado C.M. *Her Body and Other Parties*. - Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2017. - 23 p.

<sup>10</sup>Botting F. *Gothic*. 2nd ed. - London: Routledge, 2014. -160 p.

<sup>11</sup>Wisker G. *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction*. - London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. - 52 p.

<sup>12</sup>Вацуро В.Э. *Готический роман в России*. - Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2002. - 25 с.



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formal experiments of Toni Morrison and Carmen Maria Machado, the genre has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to absorb new cultural anxieties and to translate them into compelling aesthetic forms. The enduring power of American Gothic lies precisely in this adaptability: it remains, as it has always been, the literary conscience of a nation that has never fully reckoned with its own dark history.

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