

The Evolution Of The Gothic Genre In English Literature: Analyzing The Influence Of Historical, Social, And Cultural Factors On The Development Of Gothic Fiction From The 18th Century To The Present Day

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Abstract

The author of this analysis elucidates the origins of Gothic literature, how it evolved throughout time, and how it has affected modern society in this piece. Because of the elements and attributes that are portrayed in an illogical and nonsensical manner, the genre is contentious in and of itself. The number of people who are interested in science and technology has significantly increased in the twenty-first century. Every theory or hypothesis must demonstrate reason and logic in order to be embraced by the broader public. It is possible to see that readers are treating science fiction with the same caution that science has shown. It would seem from this that stories featuring themes or aspects related to death, mystery, suspense, the paranormal, omens, curses, dread, or horror are not particularly appealing to readers. However, this literary subgenre still has a stable position in the literary canon and occasionally garners more attention than other subgenres. In other words, the concepts and components that comprise the Gothic genre have existed since the dawn of time and have had a profound influence on human existence. Both television and cinema present the narrative and gothic horror genres. Fear, anxiety, right and wrong, are all too common even in this day and age. Not only that, but people enjoy reading scary and deadly stories for their own fun. Furthermore, an effort is being made to look at this literary genre from the perspective of the motion picture business.

Keywords:- Genre, Gothic, Historical, Social, Cultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature is nonetheless significant in today's society, despite the genre's seeming obsolescence. Despite its reputation as a very unstable literary form, it is said to be incredibly persistent and creative, with works spanning 250 years (Hogle 2002: 1). Most people think that Gothic genre is unstable since its elements spawned new genres and eventually contaminated nearly every other genre. Although Gothic is still quite popular today, there are numerous variations on the theme, and not everyone can identify them as such. To understand Gothic literature's place in current society, one must first look at the genre's beginnings and development in order to pinpoint its defining traits. Then, one must apply these traits to contemporary Gothic writing.

It is challenging to describe the literary genre of gothic literature. This is partially because there isn't a widely accepted description since there are ongoing debates over the genre's structure and the key components that define it. According to Lyoneil (1923, 453–4), the term "Gothic" was employed in the eighteenth century to refer to "barbarous," "medieval," and "supernatural" earlier eras. This is referenced in Botting (2012): 13. When describing literature, art, or architecture that fell short of the neoclassical taste standards, the term was used disparagingly. In Botting's words (2012), "Gothic signified the lack of reason, morality, and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs, and works." Gothic design served as a sign that these attributes were lacking. Gothic literature was a particularly rebellious literary form in the eighteenth century, questioning not just the aesthetics of the day but also the established social structures, authority figures, and current social issues. This literary genre has a huge amount of influence. It first appeared during times of political and religious unrest, and as a result, it was at its height during such periods. For this reason, the so-called end of the millennium or end of the century It was a metaphor for the fears that come with change as well as the decline of moral, ethical, and social norms. According to Botting, the term "Gothic" evokes feelings of anxiety and terror that are connected to both past tragedies and current challenges and changes. Feudal barbarism, superstition, and tyranny had to be rejected by a culture that defined itself in terms that were diametrically opposed to one another because the degree to which it distinguished between the values of the past and the values of the present was a crucial factor in determining its development, civilization, and maturity (2012: 14).

It is exceedingly hard to find precise examples of Gothic history. The Gothic style was thought to have been unique to the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. This time frame started in 1764 with the release of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and ended in 1820 with Charles Maturin's *Melmoth, The Wanderer*. However, as these works bring the Gothic to a final conclusion, critics are left with the dilemma of needing to create new categories for the works that support the Gothic heritage. Because of this, some critics believe that the Gothic genre petered out after 1820 (Potter 2005: 4). Montague Summers, Edith Birkhead, Robert Mayo, and Devendra Varma are some of these critics. David Richter states that the Gothic style is "virtually extinct by 1822" (Byron, Townshend 2014: 197?). Richter goes to great efforts to claim this. On the other side, critics like David Punter, Franz J. Potter, and Catherine Spooner believe the Gothic never truly died but instead evolved to represent a range of realities. They regard the years from 1764 to 1820 to be a part of the classic Gothic period. However, novels such as *Uncle Silas* (1864) by Sheridan Le Fanu, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) by Edgar Allan Poe, and *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1823) by Mary Shelley are not artefacts of the past but rather the Gothic novel's historical development. Given this, it is possible to interpret the second wave of Gothic fiction as a revival that occurred in the 1890s, sometimes referred to as the Age of Decadence. Many literary masterpieces were released during this time period, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891), Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The Victorian Gothic subgenre sprang from the well-known themes of Gothic literature from the seventeenth century. It incorporated elements of lunacy, doubling, psychological and physical horror, and inherited curses. The Gothic fiction that was so popular in the nineteenth century gave rise to this subgenre. These Gothic elements—which gave the book a more scary and realistic quality—were influenced by Victorian ideas about science and death, particularly atavism and Darwin's theory of evolution. These elements made the writing seem more horrifying and realistic. Novels like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* were written as a result of the growing interest in the aforementioned. These

elements influenced the growth of pulp fiction, science fiction, and dystopian fiction in the 20th century. The mystery book was another literary subgenre that emerged in the 1800s. Because he published *Moonstone* (1859) and *Woman in White*, Willkie Collins is regarded as the "grandfather of English detective fiction". It is acknowledged that in 1887, Arthur Conan Doyle created the fictional investigator known as Sherlock Holmes. Of all the fictitious detectives, he is the most famous. When talking about the twentieth century, the 1920s and 1930s are commonly referred to as "the Golden Age of Detective fiction". Many incredibly well-known writers rose to fame during this Golden Age; among them was Agatha Christie, who is often regarded as the most well-known mystery writer in the annals of the genre. The most popular writers at the time were said to be Margery Allingham, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Ngaio Marsh. Three writers have influenced the detective fiction genre in the twenty-first century: Ian Rankin, Janet Evanovich, and Ruth Rendell.

The tendency of abandoning other Victorian customs and the Gothic style became fashionable at the start of the twentieth century. Gothic fiction was seen to be incompatible with the modernist trend. Despite this, a quotation from Virginia Woolf stated, "We tremble because of the spirits within, not because of the rotting corpses of barons or the underground activities of ghouls" (Spooner 2007: 39). This suggests that modern times have resulted in a reevaluation of the vocabulary associated with Gothic art. This implies that the emphasis on internal drama as opposed to theatrical exhibition characterises a modernist interpretation of Gothic art. The Gothic genre is present in even the most modernist of works. Gothic elements can be found, for instance, in the cannibal threats and claustrophobic jungle setting of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the oppressive, gloomy city streets and corrupted priests in James Joyce's novel *Dubliners* (1914), or the Gothic imagery of T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, which features tarot readers, femmes fatales, and walking dead. From the perspective of the new modernist register, each one of them suggests the well-known Gothic challenges. On the other hand, the Gothic of the twentieth century did not only survive as Gothic elements strewn across other genres; it also flourished as a genre.

One notable example is the American southern Gothic, which upheld the Gothic tradition even in the face of modernist rejection. Southern Gothic employed Gothic imagery to evoke feelings of horror or dread in the audience while also analysing the social issues and cultural traits of the American South. Authors like Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), William Faulkner (*Sanctuary*, *Absalom! Absalom!*, *A Rose for Emily*), Anne Rice (*The Feast of All Saints*, *The Witching Hour*), Cormack McCarthy (*The Road*, *No Country for Old Men*), and many more are among the major exponents of this genre. New-Gothic romance was another popular subgenre literary style in the 20th century. One of the most commonly cited examples of modern Gothic romance is Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*, which is essentially a reworking of Jane Eyre (Yardley 2004). The recurrent themes, concepts, and narratives found in Gothic literature are among its most distinctive characteristics. A later novel by Victoria Holt, *Mistress of Mellyn*, is seen as a retelling of *Rebecca*, which was also influenced by Jane Eyre. Between the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the "gothic romance" subgenre gave way to "paranormal romance," in which the main characters were werewolves, vampires, fairies, zombies, and other terrifying creatures. The most contentious examples of paranormal romance at the time may be found in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series novels.

2. THE HISTORY OF GOTHIC FICTION

Some of the earliest works of Gothic fiction and literature were composed in the second part of the eighteenth century. The predominant source of inspiration for Gothic fiction is the dark romantic movement, a subgenre of Romanticism distinguished by a sombre ambiance. Even though it finally took over the entire globe, the movement was particularly well-liked in German and English-language literature. This is even though it ultimately took hold everywhere. Among the most well-known female Gothic writers are the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve, and Mary Shelley. Another well-known author in the genre was Anne Bronte. Novelists like Mary Shelley are likewise regarded as remarkable.

Most people agree that Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto*, which was originally published in 1764, is the work of literature most commonly cited as having invented the Gothic

literary genre. Most people think that Ann Radcliffe was the first to establish the Gothic literary genre. Her early success as a professional Gothic writer can be attributed in part to the unsettling and disturbing nature of her writings. Her works are renowned for being horrifying and eerie. Author Mathew Lewis is the creator of the Gothic fiction novel "The Monk," which debuted in 1796. Another literary movement that adopted the Gothic narrative form was the Romantic era.

Some individuals think that because of certain characteristics, Romanticism and Gothicism are comparable to each other. The predominant romanticism of this particular era was Dark Romanticism, a subgenre of romanticism in which gothic traits and features are seen to share comparable forms. On the other hand, certain Dark Romantic tales have the power to create a tense and terrifying atmosphere. Some elements of mystery, death, omens, and curses may be found in the writings of Mary Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The supernatural is present in the writings of both authors. Black romanticism may be recognised by the use of gory imagery, terrifying tales, themes relating to the paranormal, and gloomy, picaresque settings. The use of these components sets black romanticism apart in addition to these traits.

Most people would agree that some of the most remarkable Gothic masterpieces were produced during the Victorian era, which spanned from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian era is widely acknowledged as the first period in England's history to be simultaneously industrial and urban. The industrialization process was becoming a more pervasive phenomenon in society at this time. During this time, this change took place. The prior agrarian society was eventually supplanted by the industrial world. Individuals' interests and standards of life changed in tandem with the growth of towns and cities. The first nation to identify examples of work culture was England.

The quantity of research and discoveries done in science increased steadily. Since science was founded on reason and logic, it was not unexpected that people were growing more open to the idea of doing scientific research. As such, we were living in a time of complete transformation in all spheres of life, including the political, social, cultural, moral, and religious. Every area of life was undergoing this change. The book was the sole genre that the

authors used in their creative works; they did not write in any other genres. mostly because the novel offered a realistic portrayal of the culture that predominated at that time.

On the other hand, everyone on the planet was terrified and even terrified by Bram Stoker's intriguing Gothic book *Dracula*, which was released in 1897.

The literature that was considered Gothic included a wide range of taboo topics. These topics include, for instance, the peculiar character of people and insanity. The insane lady who is Rochester's wife is hidden on Thornfield Hall's third floor in Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Bronte is the author of the piece. It is possible that the Victorian age in England had a significant influence on the development of Gothic literature in that country. This is a result of England's Victorian era. The period was distinct and characterised by a multitude of varied elements, many of which found their way into the subversive literature of the day. These two attributes were present. Viewers of today would never have had the chance to experience the terror and thrill of the genre's greatest and most enduring creations and characters if it weren't for the conservative Queen Victoria's pervasive influence on her subject and the ensuing complete strangeness of the Victorians, both in terms of their beliefs and their practices. This is due to the fact that the ideas and practices of the Victorian era were wholly unorthodox.

3. GOTHIC FICTION IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

The modern ghost story originated in the second half of the nineteenth century, a time of cynicism despite the widespread belief in ghosts and other spectral phenomena throughout that age. On the other hand, modern ghosts can take on any shape, including the spirits of animals, and they can also be more aggressive and malevolent than the ghosts seen in early Gothic literature. At the start of the twentieth century, there was a spike in the number of people who enjoyed reading horror stories. The increasing modernization of society coincided with an increasing awareness of science fiction and detective fiction among the public. However, the advent of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922—a novel in which the protagonists are turned into ghosts—proved once more that society still adheres to the Gothic taste. This was a

noteworthy occasion. Daphne du Maurier brought back to life the Gothic Romantic legacy with her 1938 novel *Rebecca*. The Gothic literary genre continues to produce a sizable number of writers today. Gothic elements may be seen in the works of several contemporary horror writers, such as Susan Hill, Stephen King, Anne Rice, and Stella Coulson. The earliest instances of gothic fiction in television and movies did not happen until after the first half of the 20th century. This new approach proved difficult for the general public to experience Gothic stories. The bizarre and terrifying creatures, ghosts, collapsing castles, and other odd happenings had previously been witnessed by the spectators. The odd events have happened to other people as well. Parts of Indian culture were integrated into the Gothic tradition starting with the 1949 and 1958 releases of the films *Mahal* and *Madhumati*, especially with regard to the idea of rebirth. Gothic story travels persisted throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Gothicism gained popularity over time as a major influence for several theatrical pieces, successful motion pictures, television shows, and graphic horror novels.

4. GOTHIC TRADITION ORIGINS

Europe went through a profound and quick era of social, cultural, and religious transformation in the eighteenth century, which finally led to the creation of the Gothic legacy. Furthermore, a significant portion of critical critique concentrates on the ways in which Gothic literature portrays dread as a response to the breakdown of tradition, gender roles, oppression, and racism. This is so because the social context in which these kinds of works were produced is intrinsically linked to them. Scholars have demonstrated that individuals in nineteenth-century Europe and America were fervent believers in physiognomy—the theory that a person's physical attributes and "blood" determined and reflected their personality. These beings had dark skin tones, thick eyebrows, and dark eyes—physical characteristics linked to evil. Gothic literature's portrayal of monsters and villains, who have certain physical traits, is an illustration of this dedication to physiognomy. A large number of academics have looked at the clear racial implications of the theory that personality and genetics are correlated.

"Sublime" and "beautiful," in Edmund Burke's words, are only used inappropriately frequently. Burke makes this claim in "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful," a 1757 publication. His goal is to identify and distinguish between the two statements based on the psychological foundations they have in common. The discussion covers three topics: personal passions, essences that arouse emotion in people, and the natural rules that govern the first two of these matters. Unlike previous aesthetic theories, this approach permits both physiological and psychological causes related to the aesthetic experience, which is one of its unique features. Burke explores and defines the notion of the sublime in the first section of the essay. In his defence, he argues that joy—which is reliant on the absence of suffering or danger—was the first example of the sublime. It evokes emotions of amazement, confusion, and relief mixed with a hint of terror. This is a visceral reaction to the innate need to defend oneself in a dangerous situation. Here is where his viewpoint departs from previous aesthetic theories: in reality, the sublime is centred on the feeling of terror. Burke says that the only way to get magnificent inspiration is to face oneself with horrible notions. When people encounter ideas like vastness, difficulty, strength, darkness, vacuity, obscurity, stillness, loneliness, infinity, immense solidity, and brilliance, they sense fear. In other words, Gothic literature—that is, books and stories with settings like the eerie, dark cemetery, the haunted castle, and the lone house on the hill—has greatly impacted and inspired this specific notion of the sublime. Readers have been enthralled with images like these for years. Burke believed that the most profound and profoundly profound emotion of the sublime might be evoked by images of nature. The unparalleled size of the ocean and the unfathomable darkness of a dense forest are two instances of this. Burke's views on the sublime and his creative, unique approach won him recognition from critics. Burke received great recognition for both of these elements. Literary critic David Punter has noted that in the 1890s, four works—Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)—all combined the Decadent and Gothic styles. All of these works, according to author Punter, "are concerned in some way or another with the problem of degeneration, and consequently with the essence of the human." Gothic literature has also been used to illustrate national identity

and social class experiences, such as the challenges faced by Irish immigrants in English culture. Raphael Ingelbien, a critic, has offered a psychological perspective on how Elizabeth Bowen's literary works and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* use the Gothic to symbolise Anglo-Irish identity.

Scholarly studies on the relationship between race and the Gothic have linked white people's fears and worries about black people's presence in society to their desire to preserve the status quo of white people in power and black people in servitude. The way that African Americans' experiences are depicted has also been examined by this research. Toni Morrison earned the Pulitzer Prize for her work *Beloved* (1987), which depicted the horrors of slavery via Gothic styling. She looks at how the Gothic's use of the image of "impenetrable whiteness" to represent "black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control" strengthens the system of slavery and allays white Americans' fears of black Americans in her novel *Playing in the Dark* (1992). Morrison has linked the study of writers' explorations "of the self-contradictory features of the self" to how blackness is portrayed in literature. According to Teresa A. Goddu, a historian, "a focus on slavery, America's most glaring cultural contradiction, shows how it produced gothic narratives during the antebellum period and how these narratives reproduced the scene of slavery." This alludes to the relationship that exists between the Gothic and the African American experience, as evidenced by works like as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). Through an analysis of Louisa May Alcott's sensationalist Gothic tale "Taming a Tartar" (1867), Teresa Derrickson shows how even writers who support racial equality in both their writing and personal lives are complicit in the vocabulary of racism. Derrickson argues that "tracing the careful way in which the 'monstrous' nemesis of the narrative's triumphant protagonist embodies nineteenth-century fears of racial degradation ... underscores the infiltrating power of the Gothic impetus." Using a sexual relationship between a black man and a white woman, Charlotte Dacre's novel *The Moor* (1806) is examined by Anne K. Mellor to show how "the Gothic has long enabled both its practitioners and its readers to explore subjective desires and identities that are otherwise repressed, denied, or forbidden by the culture at large."

Mellor starts her examination with how the two characters' sexual interaction is portrayed in the book.

The majority of commentary on the relationship between women and the Gothic focuses on works of Gothic literature authored by women as well as representations of women in works of Gothic literature authored by men. Women were supposed to defer to men's authority and were granted relatively little privileges in the middle of the 1800s. Women were not only denied the ability to vote, but also the ability to own private property. It was socially expected of women to keep their personal feelings to themselves while they were with males. Rather, they were supposed to always follow the rules of charity, chastity, and support for men. Nevertheless, as the contentious Gothic literature shows, these fixed roles were undergoing changes. Feminist scholars are particularly interested in the Gothic books' unusually high number of strong female protagonists as well as the scornful criticism that these characters' autonomous and frequently sexual activity received from other writers. Gothic literature is renowned for its powerful female protagonists. Furthermore, modern critics draw attention to the historical prevalence of the usage of female sexuality as a metaphor for evil, authority, and rebellion. By the time the story ended, female characters had either become devils or villains who were either punished or had come to understand their transgressions. Even though they were characters, they were often portrayed as horrible seductresses. Feminist critics have noted that the roles were frequently reversed in Gothic literature, with the male protagonists becoming the victims. Women were portrayed in earlier works as helpless victims who needed to be saved. But the roles were often reversed in Gothic fiction. According to some academics, Gothic novels allowed middle-class female readers of the 1800s to sense freedom via the deeds of the female protagonists. However, other scholars think that Gothic literature frequently addresses the affirmation of marriage.

Feminist historians have paid close attention to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* (1818) because it explores themes that are characteristic of the feminine Gothic tradition. These subjects include women's bodies, female sexuality, and the fear and anxiety that accompany delivery. Several twentieth-century female writers, including Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), and

Diane Johnson's *The Shadow Knows* (1974), were examined for their modernised Gothic interpretations from the standpoint of feminist Gothic theory. These interpretations convey the unique social and psychological realities of women in the twentieth century, which are usually suppressed. Gothic and horror literary elements are used by contemporary female writers to illustrate the fear of being viewed as abnormal by the community for pursuing and supporting creative and professional endeavours that are deemed outside the conventional—and, therefore, acceptable—sphere for women, or for choosing to postpone or eschew becoming pregnant, married, or parents. These narratives offer a thorough explanation of the particular and intense fear and anxiety that women feel when they fear rejection or being abandoned because they refuse to accept the roles that have been assigned to them and when they fear being stuck in roles that are constricting and limiting. The work most commonly cited as an example of female Gothic art is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novella "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). The novella was a severe condemnation of the commonly held view that women who found parenting and household tasks unfulfilling or even restrictive were mentally sick, which shocked readers and critics when it was released. Published in 2009, the novella fictionalises Gilman's true story of receiving a prescription for the "rest cure," a popular therapy for depression. This was mostly because the female protagonist's nervousness and eventual descent into madness were eerily realistic depictions of actual occurrences. Due to the work's critical evaluations, attention has focused on how Gilman used Gothic and horror elements to portray the hopelessness experienced by women who were both physically imprisoned and denied the right to free thinking and expression.

5. CONCLUSION

In the seventeenth century, a work of Gothic literature was first published in England. Gothic writings originate in the Middle Ages. It is widely acknowledged that Gothic literature and Dark Romanticism are closely connected subgenres of Romanticism. Gothic literature is able to effectively arouse fear in its audience by persuading readers to believe in supernatural entities such as monsters, ghosts, vampires, omens, curses, and other supernatural beings. Scientific improvements and developments occurred along with civilization's transition into the nineteenth century. There was

no suggestion that Gothic fiction was considered less important by the literary community. Throughout the Victorian era, some of the most gifted Gothic writers were also active. It was an industrial era. England made the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy at some time. Two significant events in the 20th century took place during World Wars I and II, respectively. In the conflicts and wars, a wide range of contemporary military equipment was employed, including chemical weapons, aircraft, tanks, and other sophisticated military gear. People's thoughts began to give rise to a new kind of mentality. The study's conclusions indicated that the second half of the twentieth century was more developed than the first half. The ways that humans have lived have evolved over time. It was determined to instill a whole new culture throughout the organisation. It is getting more and more populated. Science is coming closer to enabling humans to live more pleasant and convenient lives. Despite this, Gothic literature appears to be content with the current state of affairs. Gothic literature has been used into a variety of television and film shows. The modern man is well prepared for all of his goals and achievements. But it seems like he's getting more interested in Gothic literature as he keeps developing his mental faculties and broadening his vision beyond the box.

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