

Gothic Literature And Its Uge Of Ghosts, Vampires, Monster, Other Dark Characters, Dark Images And Symbols

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Abstract

From the mid eighteenth century till the present days Gothic fiction has been in a mode of constant shift. According to Wheeler the 'gothic' was a pejorative term "used to denigrate objects, people, and attitudes deemed barbarous, grotesque, coarse, crude, formless, tasteless, primitive, savage, and ignorant". The setting, the use of ghosts, vampires, dark characters, dark symbols and images, use of horrific or sad sounds, supernatural elements, mysteries and secrets etc. The setting of gothic text or films can be seen in an old castle plagued by an ancestral curse. The atmosphere must be gloomy, darkness prevails the area and a threatening background. Flashes of lightning accompany revelation and thunder and downpours usually prefigure the appearance of a character or the beginning of a significant event. The weather mirrors the characters' moods in some texts. The female often faces events that leave her terrified, screaming and fainting.

Keywords: Ghost, Dark, Horrific, Supernatural, Gloomy

The term 'Gothic' was first originated in 12th century France. From the medieval architecture and ornate reader can feel a sense of gothic. But gothic genre was first prominently used in literature at the time of late 18th century. This genre used the image of horror and terror for giving a special sense to the novels, fictions or in any literary works. The sense of horror and terron within the works in a serious manner creates a sense of disbelief and the reader need a kind of imagination to think that something beyond will happen than what is immediately in front of us. According to Wheeler the 'gothic' was a pejorative term "used to denigrate objects, people, and attitudes deemed barbarous, grotesque, coarse, crude, formless, tasteless, primitive, savage, and ignorant".

The historical context of Gothic Literature has evolved with the prevailing social, political, and personal events of the authors and their times. Regardless of the context and setting, such as the Salem Witch Trials, the American Revolutionary War, the Vietnam War, the post-Zombie apocalypse, unrequited love (a timeless theme), works of Gothic literature utilize common elements that keep readers coming back for more. Though the genre has come in and out of popularity, authors throughout the ages continue to have an audience for their stories of terror, horror and mysteries of the supernatural. The supernatural elements in the story, though, launched a whole new genre, which took off in Europe. Then America's Edgar Allan Poe got a hold of it in the mid-1800s and succeeded like no one else. In Gothic literature, he found a place to explore psychological trauma, the evils of man, and mental illness. Any modern-day zombie story, detective story, or Stephen King novel owes a debt to Poe. There may have been successful Gothic writers before and after him, but no one perfected the genre quite like Poe. Sigmund Freud wrote a celebrated essay on 'The Uncanny' (1919), which he defined as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'. [1] Gothic novels are full of such uncanny effects – simultaneously frightening, unfamiliar and yet also strangely familiar. A past that should be over and done with suddenly erupts within the present and deranges it. This is one reason why Gothic loves modern technology almost as much as it does ghosts. A ghost is something from the past that is out of its proper time or place and which brings with it a demand, a curse or a plea. Ghosts, like gothics, disrupt our sense of what is present and what is past, what is ancient and what is modern, which is why a novel like Dracula is as full of the modern technology of its period – typewriters, shorthand, recording machines – as it is of vampires, destruction and death.

The use of words like horror and terror in gothic literature have some differences. The word terror means fear and anxiety when reader is aware that something horror thing is going to happen. Terror is a kind of mental state. But the word horror is a physical repulsion. Horror also includes fear when reader is feeling fear about something that has been happened. One feel horrified about the body he/she found. One feel terrified when he/she realizes that the killer is coming for him/her in next. Ann Radcliffe is a prolific writer of gothic novel, argues that "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them."

According to Radcliffe, terror in its ambiguity moves us toward yet another effect: “the sublime.” The sublime is the confused awe at greatness and darkness our mind can’t grasp. We are both attracted and repelled by it. Gothic scholar Devendra P. Varma elaborates the difference between terror and horror and says that: “Terror thus creates an intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world. Horror appeals to sheer dread and repulsion, by brooding upon the gloomy and the sinister, and lacerates the nerves by establishing actual cutaneous contact with the supernatural.”

A few of the most influential and popular 18th-century Gothic writers were Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*, 1765), Ann Radcliffe (*Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*, 1796), and Charles Brockden Brown (*Wieland*, 1798). The genre continued to command a large readership well into the 19th century, first as Romantic authors such as Sir Walter Scott (*The Tapestry Chamber*, 1829) adopted Gothic conventions, then later as Victorian writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1886) and Bram Stoker (*Dracula*, 1897) incorporated Gothic motifs in their stories of horror and suspense. Elements of Gothic fiction are prevalent in several of the acknowledged classics of 19th-century literature, including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831 in French), and many of the tales written by Edgar Allan Poe such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). In the Twentieth Century, new writers came along altering the Gothic form somewhat in order to focus more on horror and the supernatural. Vengeful ghosts, vampires, werewolves and their unholy associates were the new Gothic stars. Important English twentieth-century writers in this Gothic tradition include Algernon Blackwood, William Hope Hodgson, M. R. James, and Marjorie Bowen.

The gothic novels, fictions, films or any literary gothic texts have some of the features of gothic genre. The setting, the use of ghosts, vampires, dark characters, dark symbols and images, use of horrific or sad sounds, supernatural elements, mysteries and secrets etc. The setting of gothic text or films can be seen in an old castle plagued by an ancestral curse. The atmosphere must be gloomy, darkness prevails the area and a threatening background.

Flashes of lightning accompany revelation and thunder and downpours usually prefigure the appearance of a character or the beginning of a significant event. The weather mirrors the characters' moods in some texts. The female often faces events that leave her terrified, screaming and fainting. Returning to her medieval role as damsel in distress, the virtuous heroine is typically incarcerated in a castle and pursued by a sadistic aristocrat. The story must include supernatural creatures, vampires, devils, ghosts, monsters, demons, zombies to evil spirits, the "possessed," and werewolves. Aristocratic, suave, moody, solitary, cynical and nursing a guilty secret, this darkly attractive and conflicted male figure surfaces everywhere in Gothic fiction. The Gothic novel is enthralled with death and the supernatural contributing to an atmosphere of horror. If Gothic literature reflects a wish to overcome one's mortality, there is also a fear of those who somehow manage to transcend it; i.e. vampires, whom are at once both dead and alive. The death of many characters within text creates terror. The dream of a murdered character in villain's sleep and creates a terrific view among readers.

"The Castle of Otranto" is the first gothic novel by Horace Walpole that was published in 1764. "The Castle of Otranto" is a work whose aesthetics have shaped modern-day gothic books, films, art and music as well as the goth subculture. In this novel reader can see that the use of medieval castle which has been named as Strawberry Hill House. The novel is centred by a medieval story of love, knights, horror, and curses that features several twists and turns along the way. As the story opens, there is a wedding that's supposed to happen between Conrad, the young son of Prince Manfred and Isabella. The marriage is not intended for love nor do Isabella's parents know. Isabella's father, Frederick, is away at the crusades and is presumed to be dead, as is her mother. On the morning of the wedding servants find Conrad's body crushed under a helmet large enough to fit a giant. This horrific event leads to the curse which is an ancient prophecy pertaining to Manfred's family. It states "the castle should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it." As the novel goes on the true colours of Manfred come out and he loses his mind which leads him to then try and force Isabella to marry him. Isabella is horrified but escapes him with the help of Theodore, a peasant who has been imprisoned in the castle by Manfred. The image of Alfonso declares that his grandson, Theodore, is the true heir of Otranto. The novel ends with Frederic offering Isabella's hand in marriage to Theodore.

So, the setting of the novel is mysterious which is creating suspense. The novel has used the dark character like Manfred and Conrad. Violent deaths and the supernatural seem to surround the reoccurring themes in the gothic genre. The deaths can be sudden and with no warning at all, like when Manfred accidentally kills his own daughter Matilda. The death of Conrad by large helmet provides a horror in the reader's mind. Chilling coincidences, ghostly visitations, arcane revelations, and violent combat combine in a heady mix that terrified the novel's first readers. The setting of the novel shows the reader that there are hidden secrets from everyone in the story. A god, or at least a ghost, was absolutely necessary, to frighten us out of too much sense. He explored us as human beings knowing we desire to be interested by terror. He blended mystery, love, and terror and called it gothic. The media in today's society still takes elements from Walpole's novel to use in their own works.

In "Wuthering Heights" by Emily Bronte, the elements of gothics have been applied in a very subtle way. In 'Wuthering Heights' by Emily Bronte, the characters find destiny and death most of time, which causes s in a kind of intrigue with doom that colours the novel. Wuthering Heights is a great example of Gothic Literature, owing in no small part to the madness, decay, setting, and perhaps something a bit out of the ordinary. The setting of the novel has a gothic sense. Bowen adds that the supernatural occurrences offer the reader a "possibility that there may be things beyond human power, reason and knowledge", which is supposed to arouse his imagination. In Wuthering Heights, the supernatural is introduced by the presence of ghosts, which not only terrify the reader, but also actively interfere in the story and, together with the presence of the villain-hero and the use of violence, significantly influence its flow of events. In fact, the appearance of one particular ghost is crucial for the novel, because it rapidly affects the conclusion of the story, and this is the ghost of Catherine. It firstly appears in Mr Lockwood's dream at the beginning of the novel, and it is closely connected to its end for it proves Heathcliff's ongoing desire to reunite with Catherine. The latter encounters with Catherine's ghost, prior to the end of the novel, are experienced by Heathcliff, who is definitely assured of her presence in his world, even though the other characters are not able to see her.

Kolacki explains, Brontë does not make it clear whether the ghost is real or just in the minds of some of the characters (p. 5). However, the nature of the Gothic novel must be taken into consideration at this moment, for, as well as with the use of violence, the supernatural occurrences are supposed to arouse terror in the reader, not horror. Therefore, the ghostly scenes are veiled with a mystery and are not stated explicitly and sufficiently proved in the story. Tom Winnifrith says, “though Heathcliff and others seem convinced that ghosts exist, it is an ambiguous topic for the reader.” The supernatural elements occurring in *Wuthering Heights*, represented by Catherine’s ghost, are considered to be an inevitable part of the overall story, for they determine its conclusion. It begins with a “change” in Heathcliff’s character caused by the reappearance of Catherine, and consequently ends with his death, marking the achievement of his desire to reunite with his love. Emily Brontë’s novel *Wuthering Heights* has focused on three particular features of the Gothic novel, including the presence of the villain-hero, the use of violence, and the supernatural occurrences and their actual impact on the flow of events in the novel.

The novel “*Frankenstein*” by Mary Shelly also has been categorized by critics as a gothic novel. There are lots of dark settings in *Frankenstein*. When the monster is created, Frankenstein describes how it was a, ‘P58 on a dreary night of November’. the creature first breathes on a “dreary night of November.” Victor creates his monster in a remote laboratory at Ingolstadt, while the second “monster” is begun in a desolate area of Scotland. Elizabeth is killed on a stormy night, the perfect time for a dramatic murder. The supernatural event, Frankenstein’s creation is one element the author utilizes to support the Gothic genre. The setting around the creation creates an ominous mood. The dark setting and the paranormal beings are gothic elements that are used by the author to launch fear. The gothic theme of ugliness is dominant in the novel. In *Frankenstein*, the creature is described as ugly and hideous in appearance: “his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks.” Haunting is a crucial element in the plot. Jerrold E. Hogle states that “the hauntings associated with the Gothic often arise from the antiquated settings”. Victor is chased by his modern achievement in antiquated and sublime landscapes like the Arctic and the isolated island. the Gothic takes the theme of death in an interesting direction overcoming the limits of mortality is a major concern. On a certain level, Victor’s interest in creating life is an

extension of this desire to escape death. By assembling the body parts of the dead, Victor makes a “monster” who is part human and part ghost. Like a tormented spirit, his creation haunts the living.

Furthermore, the wet setting, pervaded by the utmost darkness, heralds the doom of the protagonist: “I foresaw obscurely that I was destined to become the most wretched of human beings”. The author uses wet and stormy weather, darkness and obscurity, which are elements from the Gothic fiction, to increase the suspense for readers and to arrange the appearance of the creature. Many Critics have mentioned that this novel is a scientific novel, not a gothic novel. But after observing the novel in a vivid manner, readers become able to see or feel the sense of gothic or the elements of gothic within this novel “Frankenstein”. The monster is a more effective character when he appears in these dark and gloomy settings. Sure, there is a sense of awe and grandeur when Victor encounters him on Mont Blanc amidst the beauty of nature. But the monster is Victor’s tormenter; a demon to haunt him until he has his vengeance. The essence of this horror is only captured when the monster appears in the gothic nature.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is widely considered an example of gothic novel. It represents the gothic elements under the background of slavery and racism. Although *Beloved* begins with a ghost, it does not strictly adhere to the gothic genre at the beginning of the text. If the essence of gothic is secrets, danger, mystery, distress, and an increasing sense of foreboding (Harris n. pag.), the ghost at the beginning is quite distinct. The incarnate *Beloved* threatens Sethe and reveals her past from the other side, something far more dangerous and mysterious emerges that threatens both the family and the community: a return of all the repressed death and anger of the “sixty million and more”. The setting of the novel *Beloved* uses flashback to create gloominess. It is the feeling of Sethe and other residents of the house traveling not only in physical distance but also the passage of time that creates a haunting quality. It is the element of the ghost that furthers the notion of the unknown for the reader. Like conventional gothic novel, Morrison’s *Beloved* transgresses the boundary of physical laws beyond rationality. Through various manifestations, the ghost makes itself not only visibly but also audibly perceptible, of which Stamp Paid is the witness. Madness is a common theme in the Gothic novel, which creates suspense for the readers. It also explores aspects of human nature

that cannot be easily understood. Beloved, in seeming madness, presents herself a dramatic figure of the devil. She carries insatiable desire for revenge on her mother.

The gothic elements in the novel are explicit. The character, plot and narration carry various references of the ghost, soul, blood, and killing. Morrison uses these gothic elements to manifest how slavery and racism at their cruelest level disfigure black slaves like Sethe. Such elements play an important role in *Beloved*. The supernatural occurrence creates the terrible and suspicious atmosphere. *Beloved* is far more complex than a simple haunted house story, as is made clear by the arrival of Beloved in the flesh. The sudden appearance of mysterious strangers or distant relatives is a common Gothic trope. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison used the trappings of Gothic fiction to discuss the real-life horrors of slavery and racism. Its horror rests not merely in the depiction of ghosts and undead seductresses, but in how these things represent genuine trauma that our nation is still struggling with today.

Today, Gothic literature has been replaced by ghost and horror stories, detective fiction, suspense and thriller novels, and other contemporary forms that emphasize mystery, shock, and sensation. While each of these types is (at least loosely) indebted to Gothic fiction, the Gothic genre was also appropriated and reworked by novelists and poets who, on the whole, cannot be strictly classified as Gothic writers. In the novel *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen affectionately showcased the misconceptions and immaturities that could be produced by misreading Gothic literature. In experimental narratives such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* William Faulkner transplanted Gothic preoccupations—threatening mansions, family secrets, doomed romance—to the American South. And in his multigenerational chronicle *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez constructs a violent, dreamlike narrative around a family house that takes on a dark life of its own. G. R. Thompson complains that "when the word Gothic is applied to literature it merely evokes images of ghosts, demons, trapdoors, castles." He argues, is unfortunate, and in an effort to beef up the Gothic mode, he suggests "Dark Romanticism" as a better term. Under that title, works like *Moby-Dick* or *The Castle* may be brought in to make Gothic fiction respectable.

Gothic is thus a world of doubt, particularly doubt about the supernatural and the spiritual. It seeks to create in our minds the possibility that there may be things beyond human power, reason and knowledge. But that possibility is constantly accompanied by uncertainty. In Radcliffe's work, even the most terrifying things turn out to have rational, non-supernatural explanations; by contrast, in Lewis's *The Monk*, Satan himself appears. The uncertainty that goes with Gothic is very characteristic of a world in which orthodox religious belief is waning; there is both an exaggerated interest in the supernatural and the constant possibility that even very astonishing things will turn out to be explicable. This intellectual doubt is constantly accompanied by the most powerful affects or emotions that the writer can invoke. The 18th-century philosopher and politician Edmund Burke in his 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* made a vital distinction between the beautiful and the sublime which has shaped much modern thinking about art. Beauty, for Burke, is characterised by order, harmony and proportion. Sublime experiences, by contrast – the kind we get for example from being on a high mountain in a great storm – are excessive ones, in which we encounter the mighty, the terrible and the awesome. Gothic, it is clear, is intended to give us the experience of the sublime, to shock us out of the limits of our everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanation, in the shape of awesome and terrifying characters, and inexplicable and profound events.

If we think about the poetries which have gothic elements then we can see that Graveyard poetry, Popular in the early to mid-eighteenth century that is in the decades immediately preceding Horace Walpole's seminal Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)—it is a mournful brand of poetics designed to facilitate Christian meditation on dying, death and the afterlife by way of the affective imagination. Although the most prominent examples—Thomas Parnell's "Night-Piece on Death" (1721), Robert Blair's "The Grave" (1743), Edward Young's "Night Thoughts" (1742-45), and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751)—vary quite considerably in their respective emphases, the poetic mode's imperfect label superficially draws specific attention to its defining imaginative locale, the graveyard, and all of its gloomy, nocturnal trappings: the abundant graves and tombs; the dead, whether inanimate or spectral; screeching owls or squawking rooks; the local church, a steadfast spur to faith; the cool glow of a silver moon; the seemingly sentient yews and elms; the flickering flame of a taper that seems to enliven the

shadows; and, crucially, a solitary poetic speaker or narrator, highly attuned to the sights and sounds of the dreadful scene. These are the kinds of Gothic trappings that would be familiar to the avid reader of Gothic fiction.

The most basic reading of Walpole's novel reveals it as a simple ghost story—a haunted castle where supernatural forces are working to correct a past wrong, but the Gothic goes far beyond the supernatural. Gothic fiction is an evolving genre. It adapts with the changes in time and culture. From the mid eighteenth century till the present days Gothic fiction has been in a mode of constant shift. The core elements remain the same, however, during certain time periods they may be disguised and rather than being a true, original feature they become metaphoric. *Jaws* is a Gothic film, but there are no ghosts or haunted castles, but there is a massive great white shark which stands in for the spectator, and there is an isolated island which represents the castle setting. Gothic fiction serves the public as a magnifying glass in which society can be observed and scrutinized. The supernatural creatures in many Gothic tales are not necessarily the personifications of pure evil, but rather a tool in which evil/evil-is exposed. In *The Sixth Sense* the ghosts are frightening, but the real evil is what the ghosts represent. They are victims of violence—an abused wife, a murdered child, a murdered man. The progress of Gothic fiction is ongoing. As society changes, so will the genre. Every society and culture through history has feared its demise. Gothic fiction preys off this fear, and as life goes on so does the threat of destabilization and its exposure in Gothic fiction.

References

1. Tom Winnifrith says, “though Heathcliff and others seem convinced that ghosts exist, it is an ambiguous topic for the reader.”
2. Gothic scholar Devendra P. Varma elaborates the difference between terror and horror and says that: “Terror thus creates an intangible atmosphere of spiritual psychic dread, a certain superstitious shudder at the other world. Horror appeals to sheer dread and repulsion, by brooding upon the gloomy and the sinister, and lacerates the nerves by establishing actual cutaneous contact with the supernatural.”

3. Kolacki explains, Brontë does not make it clear whether the ghost is real or just in the minds of some of the characters (p. 5).

4. Sigmund Freud wrote a celebrated essay on 'The Uncanny' (1919), which he defined as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'. [1]