

Research Article

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION TOWARDS AN AESTHETIC MODAL IN THE AUGUSTAN AND VICTORIAN GOTHIC NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The Gothic genre was born in England in 1764 towards the end of the 18th century. It developed particularly during the Romantic period, first in poetry, then in fiction. Its success is fueled by a particular attraction to the sentimental, the uncanny and the macabre, and was rooted in the rediscovery of Gothic architecture and renewed interest in the past in England. Beyond its popular and sensational aspects, the Gothic novel questions society. Monsters and supernatural figures are used as metaphors to question the roles of men and women, the weight of religion and the relationship with institutions. Gothic codes resurface in periods of upheaval, from Victorian England to the protest movements of the 1960s. Gothic literature often features dark, desolate settings, brooding characters, and intense emotional experiences, creating an atmosphere of suspense and terror.

Keywords: Gothic, characteristic, passionate, decor.

INTRODUCTION

A new literary form at the end of the 18th century, one of the most famous of which was *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), considered the first Gothic novel, marked by its darker themes, violence, foreboding settings, and use of the supernatural., Gothic fiction, like the sentimental novel to which it is closely linked, aims to educate the reader's feelings through identification with the characters' sentiments; to arouse "sympathy" through pity and fear. Moreover, to explore the human mind and the causes of Evil, so that the latter can be avoided and virtue encouraged. "Most! of the available definitions of Gothic have been elaborated by critics strictly in connexion with the original Gothic of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; yet".¹

Gothic literature is primarily devoted to stories of horror, the fantastic, and the "darker" supernatural forces. These forces often represent the "dark side" of human nature, irrational or destructive desires. Its association with darkness comes from a series of tangents: The "Goths" are originally tribes of Germanic people, the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths. The Romans considered these people and anything connected with them to be barbaric, therefore dark and undesirable. There were also a lot of short stories in the Gothic style that helped establish the conventions. The best way to understand the Gothic movement is as a subgroup of the Romantic Movement. The Romantic Movement in art sought to throw off stifling formalism and social convention, in to express emotions and spiritual feelings that had been thought unseemly. Gothic art is merely the dark side of this, expressing terror instead of rapture, dread instead of joy. "As in so much earlier Gothic fiction, psychological trouble originates in the attempt to superimpose a rational framework on the free life of the imagination, to repress the unexpected by binding it within the categories of conventional thought".²

A frightening house steeped in history, characters tormented by madness and ghosts, a pronounced sense of the tragic, a macabre

and dark atmosphere where old stones ooze with a fateful past, supernatural events or a plot shrouded in darkness and romance... Since the genre was created at the end of the 18th century, a novel must meet at least two of these criteria to be Gothic. Many of the greatest and most beautiful works of English architecture, notably England's medieval cathedrals, are largely built in the Gothic style. The same is true of castles, palaces, great houses, universities and many small, unassuming secular buildings, including hotels and market halls. Another important group of Gothic buildings in England are parish churches, which, like medieval cathedrals, are often of older, Norman foundation.

The first section of this article shows the features of gothic literature. The second highlights how Gothic writers use suspense to create melodrama, passionate romance and effects. The decor will be explained in part three, then in the final part we will present the gothic style in literary and aesthetic analysis.

1) The Aesthetics of the Gothic Novel

Gothic literature is a genre characterized by elements of fear, death, mystery, the supernatural, and romanticism. The elements which spell out the structure of the initiation rite can be found in many Gothic novels, particularly those that focus on the uncanny heroine.³

Maurice Levy has brought this literary monument back to life, burying it too deeply in the dustbin of time for my taste! An essential book for (re)discovering the masterpieces of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis etc. The natural spectacle of the sky is a constant feature of the Gothic novel. This is how in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:⁴

They had long since left both the shepherd and the hut.

the eye could not pierce the darkness, and could distinguish neither hamlet nor thatched cottage;

¹David, Punter, (1980). *The Literature of Terror*. London : Longman Group Limited.

²Ibid

³Durand, Stéphanie, Mars 2008, *Le roman gothique anglais des origines (1764-1824) et l'expérience du sacré. Une réactualisation des symboles et des structures religieuses archaïques*. Université du Québec à Montréal. <https://archipel.uqam.ca/1066/1/M10304.pdf>

⁴Ann, Radcliffe. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

only a streak of color marked the horizon. [...] They went on, absorbed in those deep reveries

Where solitude and night never fail to lead.⁵

Which gave birth to mythical motifs: haunted castles, raging moors, dark crypts, gloomy woods where young virgins in perdition, possessed beings, corrupt monks and lost ghosts roam... Great! The critic adopts a number of analytical perspectives, starting with Gothic architecture (which gave rise to a fascination with gloomy, gloomy places and monuments, the past and religion), and then with literary posterity.

Evoking excessive emotion, the Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developed a rational or properly cultivated response. We may therefore speak about the perlocutionary force of the Gothic novel as it intends to produce a certain effect upon the readers through the illocutionary act. In Gothic writings imagination and emotional effects exceed reason.⁶ (my translation)

We should underline here the critical manifesto that brilliantly pays tribute to one of history's most mysterious and fascinating literary currents. Medieval Gothic is a painting and architectural movement that was popular during the Middle Ages. Gothic art was very popular in his 12th century, and in some parts of Europe he continued into the 16th century. Many see the city as a bridge between the Romanesque era (which dominated the Middle Ages during the Crusades) and the Renaissance. Gothic works of art include paintings, sculptures, and architecture, as well as manuscripts and textual drawings. Here are a few examples of classic works of gothic literature:

2) Supernatural elements and Melodramatic Aspects of Gothic Fiction

In *Dracula* (1897), a young English notary, Jonathan Harker, is sent to Transylvania to meet a client, Count Dracula. The man he discovers is a demonic creature, an undead who drinks the blood of his victims. Dracula illustrates nothing less than the eternal struggle between Good and Evil, between God and the Devil, and this novel deeply plants the myth of a humanity divided between mortals and immortals. David Punter reported from Wordsmith that " *literature should be morally and spiritually uplifting, and of course the revival of Shakespeare and Milton was admissible on these grounds; Gothic fiction frequently depicted, and sometimes appeared to revel in vice and violence.*"⁷

Will Jonathan escape the grips of a vampire? In addition to the melodramatic, what fate awaits Mina, his sweetheart? In fact, the vampire myth has come a long way. Dracula is perhaps the closest we have come to it in terms of superstition and ancient beliefs. " *In 'Macbeth' there are three witches. Dr Faustus communicates with a demon and indirectly with Lucifer. All of 'Paradise Lost' involves the supernatural.*"⁸ However, of course, Bram Stoker did not use all the elements, otherwise Dracula would have been even uglier and would have been walking around in a shroud ;) In fact, I wonder if he is not the most fleshed-out vampire character in classic literature. It feels strange to write it, but it is the first novel about vampires. It is

impressive to think that Bram Stoker totally invented, from scratch, these imaginary creatures of the night...

As an epistolary novel, *Dracula* based on diary entries, draws us into the fast-paced story of Count Dracula. A dark, intense novel plunges us straight into the story. It is easy to understand and poset the reasons why the vampire myth was as popular as its origin! It is hard to get away from the various film adaptations, and you will find similarities with some of them. The book is very good, and I highly recommend it to all vampire book lovers. Jonathan Harker, a young British notary's clerk, is sent to a mysterious and menacing castle in Transylvania as part of his work. There he meets his strange client, Count Dracula.

As a case in point, the popularity of the vampire myth is easy to see, with this book as its origin! It is hard to get away from the various film adaptations, and you will find similarities with some of them. The book is very good, and I highly recommend it to all vampire book lovers. Jonathan Harker, a young British notary's clerk, is sent to a mysterious and menacing castle in Transylvania as part of his work. There he meets his strange client, Count Dracula. At the same time, I feel like saying, what are vampires looking for in haunted woods at two o'clock in the morning, "poor virgins in perdition?"

In this context, these are advantageously rather large books, demanding not only time but also culture, breadth, vista, subject matter, imagination and enthusiasm. These are master-books which are hard to find again, and in which, in the genre, the genius of a (generic) man can express itself in all its mad power. The critical work is good: cool, efficient, attentive and well documented. However, do not expect (we're sure you won't) to read this for the cultural load of the genre without stuffing yourself with its escalations. It is a technical and critical work that only makes sense if it adds value to a symbolic already acquired, so thorough and sober at the same time.

3) Gothic Novels decor

Generally speaking, Gothic literature delves into the macabre nature of humanity in its quest to satisfy mankind's intrinsic desire to plumb the depths of terror. The key features of gothic texts are the following Pleiades:

- 1) the appearance of the supernatural,
- 2) the psychology of horror and/or terror,
- 3) the poetics of the sublime and the Beautiful, as discussed by Edmund Burk in his essay *The Sublime and the Beautiful*⁽⁹¹⁷⁵⁹⁾: *The passion caused by the great and the sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.*
- 4) a sense of mystery and dread
- 5) the opposition of the hero/villain which creates melodrama: the uncanny.
- 6) the distressed heroine, and
- 7) strong moral closure (usually at least).¹⁰

Gothic architecture was an architectural style that flourished in Europe during the Middle Ages. It originated in France in as early as the 12th century and developed until the 16th century, spreading across the continent. It evolved during the construction of large churches in the Paris region, with the aim of creating greater height, light and volume in the city's buildings. The main elements of Gothic

⁵ibid

⁶Elena Maria Emandi et al. 2016. "Main Features of the English Gothic Novel". *International Journal of Social and Educational Innovation* (IJSEI)ro Volume 3 / Issue 6/ 2016. <https://oajii.net/articles/2017/1508-1489943548.pdf>

⁷David, Punter. (1980). *The Literature of Terror*. London and New York: Longman Group Limited.

⁸elements of the gothic.pdf

⁹Edmund Burk. (2010). *The Sublime and the Beautiful*. Digitized by the Internet Archive, Indiana State Lbrary.

¹⁰elements of the gothic.pdf

architecture were stone structures combined with large expanses of glass, groups of columns, pointed spires, large arches, rich decoration, rib vaults and buttresses, a specific form of buttress consisting of an arched structure that extends from the top of a wall to a pier. Using opulent textiles is a key component of gothic interior design. Textiles such as velvet, satin, silk, furs, tapestries, and brocade are among them. Make wall hangings, curtains, furniture upholstery, and bed coverings with these kinds of materials.

Typical Gothic sites - caves, prisons and castles - serve several functions. Castles, fulfil several functions. Not only do they symbolize the heroine's the heroine's journey of initiation, but also, through the terror they inspire, they succeed in intensify the antagonist's qualities and emphasize his dark intentions.¹¹

Gothic terror will suspend this disbelief (if not the book) to the sublime feelings that can be aroused by the mixture of pleasure and pain induced by fear. Samuel Taylor Coleridge had put forward the notion of "suspension of disbelief"¹²: *Willing suspension of disbelief is important as it is a psychological or mental process that readers and writers use to shift between words on the page and the reality.*"

Gothic horror assumes that if events have psychological consistency, even in repulsive situations, the reader will find himself implicated by his experiences and unable to reach sublime horizons, unable to surpass himself.

Gothic cathedrals are often very dark, with stained glass windows, pointed arches and few lights. The gargoyles of Gothic churches look frightening. For a time, Lincoln Cathedral was the tallest building in the world for 238 years (1311-1549) and the first building to hold that title since the Great Pyramid of Giza. It lost the title in 1549, because the central spire collapsed and was never rebuilt. Despite losing that status, it is still the third largest cathedral in England and is said to a high point in Gothic architecture due to the showcase of decorative art on display both inside and outside the building.

In the northern suburb of Paris, there is the Basilica of Saint Denis, a large medieval abbey church in the city of Saint-Denis. The building is important both historically and architecturally as its choir. The area of a church or cathedral that provides seating for the clergy and church choir shows the first use of all of the elements of Gothic architecture.

The enclosure of the sacred precinct¹³ defines an exceptional place, a sanctuary of art where one can devote oneself unreservedly to the cult of beauty, a work of faith where one can enter into communication with the infinite and the invisible. Silence invites meditation and contemplation, freeing the body from the weight of matter, freeing the mind to expand into dreams or to withdraw into an inner life.

4) The Aesthetics of Gothic Literature

Gothic literature is about reflecting a fear/anxiety that is prevailing the current society (i.e. the society that the characters are living in) DrJekyll and My Hyde is a great example - Mr Hyde is the fear of science erasing God. That, in essence, is one main aspect that

makes Gothic literature "Gothic". The aesthetic and atmosphere is fine, but your story needs a point. What is your character afraid of? What is giving them anxiety/stress? And what is this saying about the time they are living in? What are you trying to say?

According to Veronika Majlingová Dakar *"the castle is usually interpreted as a symbol of patriarchal oppression of the female heroine, it can really represent anything we fear, worry about, or repression."*¹⁴

Throughout the 19th century, fantasy literature flourished, and the Gothic influenced many English writers, such as Charles Dickens, who grimly described London's underworld, and the Brontë sisters. From the 1880s onwards, a neo-Gothic movement emerged, questioning the great fears of the time, such as urban poverty and diseases from the colonies. Inspired by the discoveries of medicine and psychology, it portrayed the ambivalence of science as a factor of both progress and destruction. Aside from these distinctive features of space and setting, Gothic is defined by the use of narrative patterns and emblematic characters. Punter observed that *"Gothic has not been well treated by literary critics; it has been said that it was crude, exploitative, even sadistic, and that it pandered to the worst in the popular taste of its time"*¹⁵.

The situations encountered which the protagonists revolve around excess, transgression of limits and the extraordinary, manifested in the ways of the supernatural or transcendence of divine or diabolical origin. *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole: This novel is considered one of the first works of gothic literature and is credited with popularizing the genre. It features supernatural events, mysterious characters, and a dark and brooding atmosphere. *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley: This classic novel tells the story of Victor Frankenstein and his creation of a monster. It explores themes of science, death, and the consequences of playing God. *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker: This novel tells the story of the vampire Count Dracula and his pursuit of new victims. It is considered one of the best examples of gothic horror and is widely recognized as a classic of the genre.

Magnified representations of Gothic architecture in literature as well as iconography shed light on this unredeemable loss, experienced as mourning. The forms of Gothic architecture are taken as a model of artistic perfection and harmony, to the point of being required to describe other expressions of beauty: the female body, nature or poetry. The descriptive statement uses the detour of analogy with the Gothic style to paint objects that are foreign to the realm of architecture, whether they belong to the visible, the concrete, the plasticity of forms or the more abstract beauty of language. Today, ghost and horror stories, detective fiction, suspense and thriller novels, and other contemporary forms that emphasize mystery: *"I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt; I fear; I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul."*¹⁶, shock and sensation have replaced Gothic literature.

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, overall, cannot be strictly classified as Gothic writers. 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). One of

¹¹Juliann E, Flennor. *The Female Gothie*, Montreal: Eden Press, 1983,311 pages. 112.

¹²Samuel. T. Coleridge. (1817). *Suspension of Disbelief*.

https://fr.slideshare.net/daya_123/willing-suspension-of-disbelief-by-samuel-taylor-coleridge.

¹³A religious or sacred precinct is the area around a religious site, such as a temple, that is dedicated to religious purposes. A religious precinct may be defined by a physical enclosure, although this is not always the case. Religious precincts are an aspect of the spatiality of religion. As they constitute the setting where evolve monsters, abbots, priests and nuns in dark uniform.

¹⁴Bc. Veronika Majlingová. (2011). *The Use of Space in Gothic Fiction Master's Diploma. Thesis. Masaryk University Faculty of Arts Department of English and American Studies English Language and Literature.*

¹⁵David, Punter, (1980). *The Literature of Terror*. London and New York: Longman Group Limited.

¹⁶Bram, Stoker. 1. *Dracula*. unknown: unknown. 1897.

the important things to remember about Gothic horror is that the setting is one of your most important characters, and atmosphere is critical. If you are using an old family manor with a long, dark history, then that house needs to live and breathe through your descriptions of it. Your story needs to be dark and foreboding, almost overbearing, with the mood. There should be secrets and mysteries. It might be raining constantly or constantly overcast, blotting out the sun and casting your entire story in shadow.

CONCLUSION

Gothic fiction emerged from a fusion of unique aspects of the eighteenth century. First, the heightened interest in England's past, especially the mediaeval era.¹⁷ The Victorian era is very fascinating. I especially like the mystery or adventure books of the era, *Doyle, Stevenson, Verne, Melville, Wilkie Collins*, and *Kipling* (though not his more imperialist stuff).

Gothic literature, mainly from England, which produced the most works, and some of the best, took shape around 1760, and corresponded to a revival, in parallel with literature, of the Gothic architectural style. This architectural fashion is reflected in the story's settings: dark, imposing castles and ruined monasteries.

Gothic imagery is soon parodied, opening the way to "cheap" fantasy cinema with Hammer Films and Roger Corman productions. From the 1960s onwards, horror films transposed Gothic elements into contemporary society, again with a view to social criticism. Today, major filmmakers continue this tradition to build unforgettable visual universes. The fact that contemporary readers enjoy reading novels such as *Dracula* proves that there is no difficulty in perceiving the atmosphere of such literary productions, that the distance separating the world evoked in them and our present reality is neither insufficient nor too ample.¹⁸

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¹⁸Elena Maria Emami et al. 2016. "Main Features of the English Gothic Novel". International Journal of Social and Educational Innovation (IJSEIro) Volume 3 / Issue 6/ 2016. <https://oaji.net/articles/2017/1508-1489943548.pdf>