



## An Insight into Diachronic Phases of Gothic Literature

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to address the genre of Gothic literature, its evolution and place in modern culture and literature. The general purpose of this research paper is to provide detailed information about the impact of gothic literature on the society followed by whether the gothic genre is irreplaceable in the upcoming future or not. Gothic fiction is a controversial genre, and while for certain critics, Gothic genre ended in the nineteenth century, for others the eighteenth-nineteenth century period represents only the first wave of Gothic fiction. In their opinion, Gothic genre actually never ended per se, but evolved, changing to reflect different realities. Based on the outcomes, this paper finds the sustainability of gothic literature in the course of time.

**Keywords:** Gothic literature, Gothic fiction, Gothic genre

### **Introduction**

The Gothic literary genre flourished in Britain between 1765 and 1838, emerging as a dark strain of eighteenth-century Romanticism. Gothic plots featured supernatural occurrences, eerie atmospheres, and decrepit architectural spaces that represented the turmoil of their tortured protagonists. It is these conventions that have allowed the Gothic to survive beyond the Gothic novel's heyday. Modern literature, film, and television rework the familiar staples of the Gothic genre. They can be set in an antiquated space—the abandoned castle, derelict labyrinth, haunted house, ruined abbey or urban underworld—which

contains a threat in the form of monsters, ghosts, or spectres which represent the return of repressed conflict that haunts the story's protagonists.

This research paper reflects upon various writings of gothic genre and the differentiation between these writings. This research focuses on the six famous gothic novels from different ages and tries to decipher the evolvement of gothic nature with the perspective of the twenty-first century readers. It focuses on the mixed elements used by the different writers and the opinions on how the gothic fiction became a separate or extinct identity of literary genre in such modern society. It will allow the readers to gather information on how the identity of horror bloomed after being disregarded from the main literary genre- gothic literature.

## **Background of the Study**

Gothic literature may seem to be an obsolete literary genre today; however, it is as relevant as ever. It is considered to be a very persistent and productive genre; its works are scattered along 250 years, despite being seen as a highly unstable literary genre. Gothic is seen as unstable, because its elements came to contaminate almost every other genre, furthermore, it generated new genres. It is still widely popular today, although its many forms are not always recognized as Gothic. In order to understand its place in modern culture, one should first look into its origins and its evolution, as means to identify the classic features of Gothic fiction, and trace them in modern fiction.

Gothic, as a literary genre is hard to define, mostly because there is not a widely approved definition of it, as there is an on-going discussion about what the genre form and main tropes are. The term "Gothic" in the eighteenth century meant "barbarous", "mediaeval" and "supernatural" past. The term was derogatory, used in discussions about art, architecture, and writing that failed to conform to the standards of neoclassical taste. "Gothic signified the lack of reason, morality, and beauty of feudal beliefs, customs, and works". As a literary genre, the Gothic was quite revolutionary, both aesthetically and politically, questioning not only the eighteenth-century aesthetics, but also the systems of authority, the social order and existing social problems.

In order to better understand the modern Gothic fiction, one should look into its origins and main tropes, and follow their evolution. Gothic genre has its roots in Renaissance tragedies, medieval romances, fairy tales, superstitions, mysteries, and early experiments in the novel. It was always inspired by the past, being a literary genre of historical recycling. The medieval notions of romance, adventure and chivalry, marvellous incidents and strange tales that re-emerged in the eighteenth century along with their wild, elemental natural settings seeped into the eighteenth-century Gothic where they were accentuated, and became a defining characteristic of the Gothic genre. Thus, the term Gothic came to be associated with the narratives which dealt with "supernatural, mysterious or

ghastly events and the apprehension or production of terror, and which were usually situated in wild, stormy landscapes, eerie manors or castles". While the eighteenth-century Gothic emphasized the mystery and its elucidation, the nineteenth century Gothic was preoccupied more with the inner condition of the protagonist, in other words, it explored the psyche and its depth.

### **Research Objectives**

- Exploring different phases of gothic literature.
- Exploring the causes of ascribing horror identity to gothic literature.

### **Research Questions**

- How the traditional way of gothic genre evolved during different eras?
- Why gothic literature was given the identity of horror fiction?

### **Significance of the Study**

We will research on gothic literature to address the changes of gothic literature through various ages with the help of some of the most famous gothic novels. To identify the different elements used by different writers writing about the same genre of gothic fiction. Moreover, we will gather information about different themes used in gothic literature and how it influenced the readers and to identify the evolution of horror fiction as a sub-genre of gothic literature. Also, by exploring the diachronic phases of gothic literature and how it evolved to horror fiction in modern times.

### **Literature Review**

While doing this research, we came across various research papers and articles who give an insight on different phases of Gothic Literature. Many articles have been written describing about the traditional and modern gothic genre. The research which we did emphasized on the changes in the gothic elements over the diachronic phases of gothic literature. We were able to gain more knowledge from different articles and research papers which focused on the evolvement of gothic fiction.

**Pagan, A. (2020, October 27). A brief history of gothic horror.** According to this article, Early novels in the gothic horror subgenre heavily feature discussions of morality, philosophy, and religion, with the evil villains most often acting as metaphors for some sort of human temptation the hero must overcome.

The novels' endings are more often than not unhappy, and romance is never the focus.

The battle between humanity and unnatural forces of evil (sometimes man-made, sometimes supernatural) within an oppressive, inescapable, and bleak landscape is considered to be the true trademark of a gothic horror novel. These are the core elements that separate gothic horror from its cousin, gothic romance. It helped us in acknowledging the books that we have chosen as a part of this research.

**Kennedy, P. (2020, January 23). What is gothic literature?** This article shared an insight on the influence of Gothic fiction in modern world and its impact changed over time. 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.

**Miller, R. (2016, September 26). The Gothic Nature of the Monster in Frankenstein.** According to this, Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* implements many elements of the gothic genre in order to enhance her horror story. The two elements that animate this genre within the text the most are isolation of characters and the dark, gloomy settings where they are isolated.

**Barrett, C. (n.d.). Gothic Fiction in the Victorian Era - The Rise of Gothic Fiction in England & the United States - LibGuides at Tufts University.** "In the Victorian era, Gothic fiction had ceased to be a dominant literary genre. However, the Gothic tropes used earlier in the eighteenth century in texts such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* were transported and interwoven into many late-nineteenth century narratives. These tropes included psychological and physical terror; mystery and the supernatural; madness, doubling, and heredity curses.

The gloomy atmosphere and persistent melodrama present in Dickens' *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*, exemplifies the transference of Gothic components into an urban, modern setting. The Victorian Gothic moves away from the familiar themes of Gothic fiction - ruined castles, helpless heroines, and evil villains - to situate the tropes of the supernatural and the uncanny within a recognisable environment. This brings a sense of verisimilitude to the narrative, and thereby renders the Gothic features of the text all the more disturbing."

**Mourier, D. (2015, November 16). Rebecca Review-A Haunting Tale - The Gothic Library.** According to this article, Rebecca is a great read for anyone who appreciates the darkness of the mind and can be thrilled by mere suspense and the threat of the unknown. Most of the novel is spent building up the narrator's sense of anxiety and inferiority. The book isn't quite scary, like one might expect

from a Gothic novel, but the narrator's nervousness is contagious. The true beauty of this book is in du Maurier's artful use of language.

**Gothic and the Gothic style and influence on literature from Crossref-it.info. (n.d.).** In literature, too, the taste for medievalism was constantly indulged, and especially its association with the strange, the weird and the exotic. If the taste for medievalism went hand in hand with the unbelievable in the Gothic horror novel, it also strongly influenced more serious 19th century writers such as the Brontës and Dickens, and 20th century and 21st century writers such as Mervyn Peake, Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood.

The article talks about the ongoing influence of gothic literature. In other areas of literature, it fostered a growing interest in 'true' medievalism: many writers saw medieval life as offering an ideal of nobility and harmony, where feudal ties linked people together in a way which was impossible in their contemporary, factory-based economy.

**Realism, horror and the Gothic in *Dracula* and Thomas Hardy's "The fiddler of the reels"** by Carol Senf, portrayed the meaning behind the different gothic elements used by different gothic writers and specifically the workings of Brahm Stoker.

**Keller, E. (2013). Crafting a Masterpiece: The Genre Mosaic of Harry Potter.** This research paper provided information regarding the role of the novel "Harry Potter" as a modern gothic work. When viewed as pulp fiction novels, the Harry Potter series capitalizes on the most useful and attractive aspects of the genre without including more scandalous details which would limit young readership and thus curtail the popularity of the series. The lure of the horror genre further heightens this popularity. From the typical grisly murder story with its vast stretches of nail-biting suspense to more mythical terrors that really do go bump in the night, horror, when well-written, can keep even the most terrified reader frantically turning pages. There are a variety of typical elements to these fearsome novels, but the most distinguishing one is violence. Murder, kidnappings, and amputations provide the basis for significant events within the series and are extremely characteristic examples of the necessary brutality of the genre.

We were really grateful for the in-depth materials that we were able to find, and which made our research gain different perspective from all around the different education sites. We were able to channelize different opinions and shared our own insight on the evolvement of the gothic fiction through the eyes of the readers of the twenty-first century.

## Research Methodology

This research paper has used document analysis approach which consists of various explorations of online data. One of these emerging methodologies is the impact of gothic literature which was initially used most in this field but also came to be used in other domains due to the multiple possibilities opened up by the availability and richness of the genre for different entertainment purposes. Likewise, the concern of how to evaluate the impact of gothic genre on society as well as its emerging factor, it has occupied central attention. The development of gothic and its impact is a contribution to advancement in the evaluation. Surveys and statistics mentioned in the paper are collected from reports and articles published by national and international agencies.

Secondary source of information are presented from some well- established journals and newspaper articles as well.

## Findings & Analysis

**In response to our first research question**, the study found that, Gothic fiction is often a literature of transformations where identity is unstable and sanity a debatable state of being. Gothic literature developed during the Romantic period in Britain and continued to evolve in different eras.

The first mention of "Gothic," as pertaining to literature, was in the subtitle of **Horace Walpole's 1765 story "The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story"** . It was the first Gothic novel and became extremely popular in the late 18th and 19th century. The story has a fairly straightforward narrative despite a couple of plot twists at the end. In his novel, Walpole attempts to combine **Old Romance with New Romance**. Old Romance greatly focuses on the supernatural and the fantastic. New Romance is more down to earth. In combining the two, Walpole is able to present ordinary characters working amidst extraordinary circumstances. The overall theme of the novel is that righteousness, or justice, will always triumph over greed. The novel shows several **Gothic elements** such as mysterious settings, mysterious and suspenseful atmospheres, ancient prophecy, visions, high emotion, supernatural events, and women in distress. The novel shows basically all the elements of Gothic Literature. The novel is a medieval tale of knights, romance, curses, and horror.

Elements of Gothic fiction are prevalent in several of the acknowledged classics of 19th-century literature, including **Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818)**. This novel is a compilation of Romantic and Gothic elements combined into a singular work with an unforgettable story. The Gothic novel is unique because by the time Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein, several novels had appeared using Gothic themes, but the genre had only been around since 1754. Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein* contains many gothic elements but also incorporates science fiction, a modern setting, and the theme of too much knowledge. The novel shows several **gothic elements** such as isolation of characters, dark and gloomy settings, theme of pain and most importantly, *Frankenstein* deals with the most intense element of goth; death. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelly is not only considered a classic gothic novel, but it is also considered by many to be the **first science fiction novel**. *Frankenstein* is simultaneously the first science-fiction novel, a Gothic horror, a tragic romance and a parable all sewn into one towering body. Its two central tragedies – one of overreaching and the dangers of 'playing God', the other of parental abandonment and societal rejection – are as relevant today as ever.

By the middle of the 19th century the Gothic novel seemed to come to its end; the term Gothic was used only in its architectural context. Paradoxically, the conditions in which it had flourished - the way of thinking during the period of the enlightenment, empirical science, Protestant religion, nationalism, superstition<sup>5</sup> - were again intensified towards the end of the century and novels of the genre appeared again. It seemed that the genre had something very attractive for the reader and almost every novel was a success.

Almost every writer tried to write something in this darker genre, even if only a tale. Expectations of horror, fear, and anxiety and of evil were very popular at the time and co-existed with the Victorian novel. Furthermore, it is not strange that the new genre of detective and science fiction became so popular at the time.

**Dracula**, by **Bram Stoker**, was the novel that paved the road for modern Gothic Literature and culture and defined its elements through classic themes of fear and the supernatural. The novel shows many of the features of the classic Gothic genre. These include **motifs like a dark setting, heightened emotions**, and the use of a damsel in distress and a mystery plot. In *Dracula* some of the main themes or universal concepts include transformation and unrequited love. *Dracula* gradually became the most significant work of Gothic horror literature because it was the perfect vessel for the fears and desires of the era. As an evil intruder who disrupted innocent lives, *Dracula* **personified all that was threatening, powerful, alluring and evil**. As Mulvey-Roberts points out, *Dracula* is a novel based on "**the decadent reliance of Empirical Science at the expense of traditional religion**" (1998, p. 87). Stoker wrote his story in an epoch, when the industrial revolution and science started to change everything. A lot has been written about sexuality in *Dracula*, about male homoeroticism, about the exchange of female bodies between men, about perverse sexual acts in connection to the drawing of blood and to the fear of female sexuality. *Dracula* is a clear demonstration of how Gothic motives are used in addition with contemporary themes and problems.

**The Woman in White** is written in 1859 by Wilkie Collins is the first and most influential of the Victorian genre that combined Gothic horror with psychological realism. *The Woman in White* was among the first of a

short-lived genre of literature called "sensation novels." The term sensation had two meanings: first, the stories were filled with horrifying or terrifying details, graveyards, nefarious villains, and thrilling lovers. Second, the books vividly described assaults on their characters' senses, such as nerve-jangling noises and overpowering smells. Sensation novels were rooted in the older gothic romances, but they also included elements of realism that made them uniquely Victorian. The new genre was wildly popular with Victorian readers. Literary critics, however, felt the stories were overly melodramatic and fraught with absurd situations, impossible coincidences, and other unlikely elements. *The Woman in White* also makes use of some classic gothic elements such as a ruined manor, ghostly scenes in graveyards, and heroines wrongfully confined. In addition to the unlikely elements of romance narratives, sensation novels included **elements of realism** that gave their stories and characters more depth. In *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcombe's assertiveness and pragmatism and Count Fosco's fascination with opera and animals give their characters lively sparks of reality. *The Woman in White* is an example of an epistolary novel—a novel written entirely in the first person as a series of documents (in this case letters, journal entries, and a few official documents).

**Rebecca (1938) is essentially a Gothic novel in the traditional sense**, though it was written much later than its 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century fellows. The mood of the novel is gothic fantasy, hovering between the daydreams of the heroine and her nightmares. Ambiguously set in the 1920s or '30s, *Rebecca* contains no elements of the supernatural, no true evil villain, and no attacks on the heroine's life. Instead, what makes *Rebecca* a Gothic novel is its focus on the core Gothic trope: the present haunted by the past—although in *Rebecca*'s case, this haunting is **purely psychological**. Daphne du Maurier, the author uses detail, diction, and imagery as literary techniques to create and shift throughout the passage between moods of mystery, a nightmare, and nostalgia. These moods evolve throughout the excerpt chronologically in three different segments. The atmosphere evolves chronologically as the narrator physically advances on her path to Manderley in her dream. In the excerpt from *Rebecca*, du Maurier uses literary devices, mainly diction, detail, and imagery to create a set of varying moods of mystery, a nightmare, and nostalgia throughout the passage. In the beginning of the passage, Daphne du Maurier uses the literary techniques diction, detail, and imagery to create a mood of mystery. The true beauty of this book is in du Maurier's artful use of language. *Rebecca* is filled with fantastic one-liners, from its famous opening line ("Last night, I dreamed I went to Manderley again") to the closing sentence that abruptly reverses the trajectory of the ending. The story is also peppered with painstaking descriptions of Manderley that bring the beautiful estate to life. Du Maurier is so skilled at pairing details with emotions that by the end of the book, mentions of looping handwriting, red rhododendrons, or the smell of azaleas will have you cringing. Overall, *Rebecca* is a great read for anyone who appreciates the darkness of the mind and can be thrilled by mere suspense and the threat of the unknown.



**Harry Potter is a fantasy novel that skilfully combines** reality with mythical concepts. Rowling's ability to provoke readers into suspending disbelief and becoming immersed in her fantastical world serves as the basis for every other genre subset within her series and functions to provide the broadest scope of appeal among her readership. Without acceptance of Harry's world, readers would not trust in the thrills of Quidditch or the horror of dark wizards or the fabled creatures on the covers of the novels. The instant belief in a modern England where wizards live among Muggles (non-wizards) in secret seems to be due, in part, to this placement of wizardry alongside the real world. Familiar locations, like train stations and middle-class neighbourhoods, serve as settings for the beginnings of Harry's adventures in Sorcerer's Stone, so readers can slowly become accustomed to layer upon layer of magical abnormality. This inclusion of reality as a backdrop to fantasy is supported by the detail through which Rowling fashions her invented world. For example, photographs and portraits are extraordinary in that the objects and people within them move and even speak. Additionally, important elements of modern culture are prominent within wizardry society, although sometimes they are accompanied by certain twists. Wizards have their own separate financial, political, transportation, and educational systems, and even unique brands of candy. Magic plays an integral role in the lives of all wizards by assisting with chores and moving objects. Elements from fairy tales appear continuously in the form of such fabled creatures as unicorns and trolls. The fantasy world of Harry Potter, filled with dangers from fairy tales at every turn, satisfies the thirst for quests that typically epitomize the genre.

In response to the second research question, the study has discussed that, ghosts and spirits in Gothic literature have been increasingly replaced by immortal protagonists and supernatural beings, such as vampires, werewolves, demons, witches, etc. The modern Gothic romances give a more elaborated account of the background of the place where the story is set, the moods of the people, along with the introduction of more characters and room for romance.

Gothic literature is popular among people of all ages although it has developed and changed significantly through the years. The basic essence of this form of writing still remains in two things — horror and mystery. "The notion of haunted or ghoulish clowns has exploded lately in popular culture and become a mainstay of social media," he said, but it all has its roots in gothic literature, adding that "we've taken the genre a step further, adapting the tried-and-true themes from gothic literature and applying them to new settings and situations. Creepy clowns are another example of our fascination with things that stalk us from the shadows that is both terrify and thrilling. Ultimately, they remind us that monsters could be real, and are still among us." An understanding of gothic literature can contribute to a richer and deeper appreciation of current horror media and traditional Halloween memes, but it also presents a foundational springboard for the sort of professional success enjoyed by novelists, such as Anne Rice, screen writers, poets and others who have found new and inventive ways to reconstruct these themes that resonate with new generations. So, over

the years, gothic literature has been a significant source of inspiration for blockbuster movies and books, and it continues to be appropriated by popular culture in new ways. This includes the growing popularity of graphic horror novels, as well as the recent social media-fanned cultural phenomenon of people dressing up as “creepy clowns” to scare people by appearing in public spaces. Thus, this is how gothic literature somewhat merges with the horror literature.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, we would like to conclude that today’s Gothic literature has evolved into a more psychological horror, featuring the characters themselves. This feature provides the reader an opportunity to indulge in the horror of the mind. This kind of development has made gothic literature still popular as it conveys deeper meanings and its elements appeal to the readers emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Moreover, gothic literature has significantly influenced today’s life. It has a great impact on how people dress, speak and act. In addition, gothic has become a major source of inspiration for today’s blockbuster horror movies, TV series and graphic novels. All these means of entertainment, indeed, forever appeal to the readers.

When thinking of gothic literature, the first thought is a black, gloomy and petrifying story. Gothic literature is just that. Gothic literature is a genre with romance and horror twisted together to bring out the unreal. This type of literature has become very popular around the world. With many people enjoying this type of genre, gothic literature has continued to expand and be well liked for over two centuries now. Although one particular author created this literature, many authors began writing gothic literature. While each author uses his or her own style of writing with different character types and settings to create a respected piece of gothic literature, all gothic writers produce a novel with a remote setting and a sense of chilling horror and romance combined.

The traditional way of writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century that laid the foundation of this genre in literature shows several Gothic elements such as mysterious settings, and suspenseful atmospheres, ancient prophecy, visions, high emotion, supernatural events, and women in distress. The works were a medieval tale of knights, romance, curses, and horror.

Then, slowly and steadily the structure and basis got transformed. For example, Frankenstein is simultaneously the first science-fiction novel, a Gothic horror, a tragic romance and a parable all sewn into one towering body. Almost every writer tried to write something in this darker genre, even if only a tale. The expectations of horror, fear, and anxiety and of evil were very popular at the time and co-existed with the Victorian novel. Furthermore, it is not strange that the new genre of detective and science fiction became so popular at the time. Then in the romantic period the works that paved the road for modern Gothic

Literature and culture and defined its elements through classic themes of fear and the supernatural. The novel shows many of the features of the classic Gothic genre. Furthermore, in other eras the works had no elements of the supernatural, no true evil villain, and no attacks on the heroine's life. Instead, what makes these works a Gothic novel is its focus on the core Gothic trope: the present haunted by the past, primarily focusing on the psychological aspect of the human mind. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, sensation novels were rooted in the older gothic romances, but they also included elements of realism that made them uniquely Victorian as well as Modern. Lastly, after the 20<sup>th</sup> century most of the works of this kind included photographs and portraits that were extraordinary and in that the objects and people within them can move and even speak. Additionally, important elements of modern culture are prominent within fantasy, although sometimes they are accompanied by certain twists. Therefore, in our opinion, Gothic literature is a literature that has been around for over two hundred years and still continues to flourish today.

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