

SAVOR OF FRIGHT: THE NOVEL OF TERROR

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ABSTRACT

Gothic romances boom profoundly in the late 18th and the early 19th century. These romances are fundamentally mysteries/obscurities pertaining to the paranormal bustle, intensely pat with dreadfulness, and typically encompass murky milieu of medieval wrecks and eerie citadels. Gothic fiction has propensity to bestow prominence to the sentiments as well as to a gratifying sort of fright, an annex to the new-fangled Romantic literary faction.

KEYWORDS: *Augury, Bereavement, Fantasy, Fright, Hallucination, Nightmare, Slaughter, Specter*

INTRODUCTION

European Romantic pseudo medieval fiction, widely acknowledged as ‘Gothic Novel’ or the ‘Novel of Terror’, is an array of literature encompassing a prevailing ambiance of inscrutability, fright and at times romance as well. Its halcyon days were the 1790s, although it went through recurrent resumptions in ensuing phases. The first half of the 18th century was purely realistic and didactic with some tinge of sentimentalism. However, after Frances Burney, the streak of realism and didacticism started losing its grasp among the writers as well as the readers and subsequently the narratives coupled with up-to-the-minute savor of romance and dread protrudes out and widens as a thriving genre.

Establishment

The foundation of this innovative vogue is accredited to the English writer Horace Walpole, who along with his cohorts delineates a blood-curdling and fur-heaving arena of ethereal citadels, uncanny carcass, ghoulish poltergeist, irksome visualization of slaughter, and multitudes of additional facets premeditated to rouse trepidation in the reader and meticulously make him fret and perspire. Initial Gothic pieces were measly thrillers, a juvenile bit sans inventiveness. The early novelists nourish their works either with medieval European or the oriental milieu without giving any privilege to the human psychology. Majority infuse their narratives with paranormal ingredients to add tenor of fright and distress corroborating them as sheer thrill-famished romantics. Conversely, with the startling work of Horace Walpole the intact portrayal of Gothic Romances underwent a colossal twirl. He was indeed a hardnosed scholar who coddles this genus as a mode of escapism from the repressive ennui of the world of realism. The terror novelists do not believe in any statement they inscribe and erect a fantasy castle just to annihilate few redundant hours left out of any rational accomplishment, an inexpressible sentiment that takes mankind ahead of their accepted wisdom.

Horace Walpole

Horace Walpole single-handedly pioneered the Gothic novel in England. Like Percy and Macpherson who are acknowledged precursors of the Romantic Movement in English poetry, Walpole with his masterpiece *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) also referred as 'A Gothic Story' becomes antecedent of the Romantic Movement in English fiction. Walpole retorts in opposition to the pragmatism, didacticism and sensationalism of the clique of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. *The Castle of Otranto* clings to each and every facet that composes the genre, be it the spirit of inscrutability, mysticism or the misdemeanor. To stir up exhilaration in his tome enthusiasts, Walpole proffers adieu to his contemporary epoch and prefer Italy of 12th and 13th century as his treasured premises. His novel was published in the 18th century, but it widens its preeminence in the 19th century too since the populace of the era started admiring dark-romantic themes.

Despite bulk of ludicrousness, *The Castle of Otranto* emerges as one of the most trendy thriller plot of its era. The writer via his personal paradigm lays out the institution of Gothic romance which was indebted to the master for plentiful attributes, like – a male protagonist desecrated by proscribed felonies, a number of victimized female characters, a fortress with surreptitious channels and eerie quarters, and a bounteous smattering of mystical ghastliness. A massive sum of playwrights viz., Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, unreservedly imbibe the genus and pen down striking tales of awe and wonder keeping Walpole and his psyche as a spring of stimulation and vivacity. However, with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the Gothic narrative attains novel stature. She is followed in convention by Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, and Bram Stoker who magnificently press forward the lineage of amalgamation amid fancy and trepidation.

Mrs. Ann Radcliffe

Another giant name in this succession is Ann Radcliffe, globally acknowledged as “the Great Enchantress” or “Mother Radcliffe” (Kremmel, “Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic” 156-158) for her conscientious sway on the Gothic literature as well as on the female Gothic writers. The lady though was an impersonator of Walpole yet she excelled the field more lucratively and inventively than her master. She is indeed the most proficient amongst every single professional of this category. Radcliffe employs the modus operandi of the enlightened mystic wherein all apparently uncanny infringements are ultimately relocated to the innate sources (Melani, “Ann Radcliffe” Web). Being an adoring companion of a columnist, Ann Radcliffe primarily started writing solely to while away her spare time like a naive but her art outshines magnificently with the emergence of her two romances - *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797). The works were unanimously acclaimed as they embrace portents of visual essentials constituting an inventive stratagem for scrutinizing the globe all the way through linguistic blueprint, spawning an ethical gape for the booklovers to envisage the world through expressions, identify with the state of affairs, and to experience the dread in similar vein like the characters themselves have witnessed (Kremmel, “Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic” 156-158). Unearthing of an ominous Gothic desperado, universally branded as a ‘Byronic hero’ goes to her credit. Even she is the one who stimulated the budding design of ‘Gothic Feminism’, a mode to escalate the status of females and formulate it as a faction to defy “the concept of gender itself” (Smith, “The Female Gothic: Then and Now” 123-125). Her spectacular endeavor of intermingling fright and wonder with visual fundamentals fascinates a throng, posing her absolutely peerless.

Matthew Gregory Lewis

English novelist Matthew Gregory Lewis, nicknamed ‘Monk’ Lewis because of his Gothic romance bearing the identical label gives the notion of an absolute digression from Mrs. Ann Radcliffe’s discourses. *The Monk* (1796) delineates an abhorrent spectacle of corporeal panic, a garish saga of ascetic dissipation, black enchantment, vicious sultriness, and necromancy that portrays the continental ‘dreadfulness’. The work may be measured as the reverie of an ‘oversexed’ juvenile, as the writer himself was barely twenty when he penned down its narrative. The depiction of wanton monks, nasty interrogators, ethereal prioresses, and slanderous sight of the Catholic cathedral dismayed the populace, however, *The Monk* proves a torchbearer for the genre’s progression. The novel comprehensively persuades Ann Radcliffe for drafting her last novel, *The Italian* (1797) on the similar standards as that of *The Monk*, still Monk Lewis’s work surpasses *The Italian* in every single splash.

Additional Core Playwrights

Other key writers viz., Miss Clara Reeve, Charles Robert Maturin, and Mrs. Shelley have made a momentous score in this new-fangled genre. The first name - Clara Reeve – motivated by Horace Walpole is predominantly recognized for her text *Champion of Virtue* which was later on titled *The Old English Baron* (1778). She becomes accustomed to the consciousness of the contemporary phase and accordingly maintains equilibrium between far-fetched facets and pragmatism/realism of the 18th century. In the preamble, Reeve inscribes:

This Story is ... literary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*, written upon ... same plan, with a design to unite the most attractive ... interesting circumstances of ... ancient Romance and modern Novel. (“The Castle of Otranto” Web)

The writer fortifies the Gothic configuration whose focal point is to inflate the fantasy realm so as to incorporate the mystical with the actual, an insignia of Walpole’s brilliance to transmute fiction as authentic and lucid (Geary, *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction* 40). Furthermore Reeve refrains to infuse humor in her works unlike her master Walpole for the reason that comic facet lessens the Gothic capability to stimulate trepidation.

Romantic poets too try their hands in this innovative genus wherein eminent poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge with his works - *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) and *Christabel* (1816), John Keats with *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1819) and *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil* (1820), Percy Bysshe Shelley with *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian* (1811), and Lady Caroline with *Glenarvon* (1816) outclass the Gothic torrent.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) is accredited as a solitary illustrious novel of terror till date. It delineates the tale of depredation of a synthetic monster, a replica of present-day robot. Shelley’s novel, despite the fact that it was evidently inclined to the Gothic convention, is well thought-out as the first science fiction novel. John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819) emerges as the most prominent work that initiates an obsession for vampire fiction and theatre. A tardy illustration of conventional Gothic is *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin, which coalesces premises of anti-Catholicism and a banished Byronic protagonist.

Victorians did not decidedly recognize this genre; relatively the form was sacked by majority of reviewers. In fact, the genus has already been corroded with the triumphant fruition of the historical romance bring into vogue by Sir Walter Scott. Yet, workers like George W. M. Reynolds penned down a trilogy of Terror novels - *Faust* (1846), *Wagner the Wehrwolf* (1847) and *The Necromancer* (1857) during this period. He also wrote *The Mysteries of London* (1845) which offers

locale to the narratives of Charles Dickens. James Malcom Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest's *Varney the Vampire* (1847) too holds an elevated stature with its vampire citations amid contemporary spectators, the first ever text that delineates sharpened teeth of a vampire ("Did Vampires Not Have Fangs in Movies Until the 1950s?" Web).

Edgar Allan Poe, a vital and inventive re-analyst of the Gothic tradition pays more attention on the psychology of his dramatis personae rather than on the time-honored fright constituents and accordingly, deems dread to be a genuine literary subject matter. His chronicle *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) surveys the 'terrors of the soul' via archetypal Gothic tropes of patrician putrefaction, fatality and lunacy (Skarda, *The Evil Image* 181-182). The sway of Byronic Romanticism of Poe is apparently witnessed in the works of Bronte sisters. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) delineates sinister Yorkshire Moors, ethereal specters and a Byronic protagonist through the portrayal of fiend Heathcliff. Feminists perceive Brontes' novels as chief paradigms of Female Gothic that discover feminine snare inside familial arena along with subjugation to patriarchal power, and exert burly efforts to sabotage and break out such twaddle curbs. Emily's Cathy and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* are apt illustrations of female leads in such tasks. Louisa May Alcott's Gothic potboiler, *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (written in 1866, but published in 1995) is an attention-grabbing sampling of this turf, while Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Doom of the Griffiths* (1858), *Lois the Witch*, and *The Grey Woman*, all exploit the universal Gothic theme - the clout of ancestral peccadillo to pest heir.

The sway of Gothic narrative is perceived in the works of distinguished writers like Charles Dickens, who slot in murky ambiance and performance in his key works by merely varying the milieu from conventional to contemporary. The narratives include *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Bleak House* (1853), *Great Expectations* (1860) and the most unequivocal Gothic text - *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), his last incomplete novel. Thus, Victorians evolve enthrallment for the terror themes and turn out to be exceedingly fixative with bereavement services, souvenirs, and transience. Some foremost texts of this era incorporates Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and some anecdotes by Canadian Arthur Machen. The most renowned Gothic rogue, Count Dracula painted by Bram Stoker in his novel *Dracula* (1897) belongs to this epoch. The 20th century too witnesses fusion of Gothic fiction and Modernism as evident all the way through the detective, horror and science narratives. The illustrious paradigms of the age are Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Contemporary Gothic

Gothic literature persists to be comprehensively adept by modern-day creators with 21st century embracing the narratives of dread and delight as a mainstream genre. Gothic romances of this portrayal turn out to be popular during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with the works of playwrights like Phyllis A. Whitney, Joan Aiken, Dorothy Eden, Victoria Holt, Barbara Michaels, Mary Stewart, and Jill Tatters. *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer pulls off an incredible stature in the dome of Gothic writings along with a 2001 Carlos Ruiz Zafon novel *The Shadow of the Wind*. A good number of contemporary writers of terror reveal substantial Gothic susceptibility in their drafts viz., texts of Anne Rice, Susan Hill, Stephen King, Poppy Z. Brite, Neil Gaiman, Poppy Z. Brite, Stella Coulson, and Thomas M. Disch. Thomas M. Disch's work *The Priest* (1994), subtitled *A Gothic Romance* is a replica of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*.

Present-day American authors who fit into this genus also identified as 'psycho-biddy' genre, include Joyce Carol Oates with his works - *Bellefleur*, *A Bloods moor Romance* and *Night-Side*, Raymond Kennedy's *Lulu Incognito*, works of

Timothy Findley, Barbara Gowdy, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood and Henry Farrell's masterpiece - the 1960 Hollywood horror novel *What Ever Happened To Baby Jane?*

Numerous Gothic traditions pertaining to specified nations like New Zealand Gothic or Maori Gothic, Australian Gothic, and Tasmanian Gothic evolve to tackle the qualms and ordeals of their realms' colonial encounters. These include Australian Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, and narratives of Kim Scott. Tasmanians take into account *Gould's Book of Fish* by Richard Flanagan, and *The Roving Party* by Rohan Wilson. Gothic is therefore, "a counterbalance produced by writers and thinkers who felt limited by ... a confident worldview and recognized that ... power of ... past ... irrational, and ... violent continue to hold sway in the world" (Senf, "Why We Need the Gothic in a Technological World" 31-32).

CONCLUSIONS

Gothic literature surfaces as a synonym of 'conjecture' and 'fright' that generates a sense of restlessness and apprehension among the spectators. It incorporates portentous locale, obscure ambiance, primordial divination, omens and portents, uncanny or unfathomable proceedings, distraught sentiment and an agonized woman as its indispensable premise. The literature merges fiction, terror, bereavement and romance and consequently, enfolds a propensity to lay prominence equally on sentiments as well as on a congenial class of fear.

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