Chapter One

The Gothic and Its Revivals

Yannis Kanarakis

1. Introduction: It’s … alive!!!!!

It is very difficult to define the Gothic as a term. There have been, of course, many attempts to do so but none adequately embraces its full range which includes many seemingly contrasting works. The term has been associated with Northern European tribes, medieval ecclesiastical architecture, and figures like Dracula, Cthulhu and Batman; it has been linked with concepts like the sublime, the uncanny or the doppelganger; and it has been used to characterize novels like *Wuthering Heights*, *The Beloved* and *American Psycho*, music by artists like Marilyn Manson, Nick Cave or Siouxsie and the Banshees, movies like *Psycho*, the *Silence of the Lambs* and *Twilight*, or even contemporary series like *Vampire Diaries*, *True Blood* or *American Horror Story*, to name but a few. All these seemingly incongruent instances are indicative of a term with a long historical trajectory that has been constantly shifting as a response to various socio-cultural and economic factors. In this sense, we might argue that the Gothic defies any definitions precisely because it is itself a term that is vibrant and non static, a term that refuses to die out, and which, despite its long history, is still […] alive and kicking.
A closer look at the historical conditions that gave birth to the Gothic and resulted in its rise will help us establish some of its basic parameters which account for its adaptability, persistence and appeal as a cultural form throughout the ages. The Gothic, as we will see, has been constantly transgressing its limitations by manifesting a great degree of inclusiveness and experimentation. This is due to the fact that it has been deeply affected by all major literary and artistic traditions it got in touch with, incorporating and appropriating elements from them in an unprecedented way and transubstantiating these elements into something new. This is precisely why it is such a mobile concept and also a vague term that has been self reflexively utilized to discuss things, emotions or ideas that lie in the twilight, are not, i.e., clear or fixed but still unformed.

This chapter will be an overview of the long historical trajectory of the Gothic, focusing predominantly on Gothic fiction and the major shifts that this genre has underwent, through an examination of landmark Gothic texts and key critical receptions of them. Moreover, by tracing the term’s long trajectory from the Middle Ages to today, we will be able to foreground the way certain Gothic motifs, devices and conventions have developed and interacted with other genres.

Learning Objectives:

✓ Familiarization with the complexity of the term.

✓ Familiarization with the literary conventions and thematic preoccupations of the genre.

✓ Understanding of the relation between earlier phases of the genre and its modern variants.

✓ Ability to detect and correlate the various cultural expressions of the Gothic.

2. Gothic Origins

Let us begin by considering the origin of the term. Initially, the term was not employed in its literary or cultural sense, but described a group of Germanic tribes, the Goths, who resided in the Northern parts of Europe, and destroyed the Roman Empire in 4 AD. During the Renaissance, the revived interest in classical culture by implication entailed that the Goths were looked down on as savage barbarian tribes that had defeated one of humanity’s greatest civilizations, the Roman, thus initiating the “Dark Ages.” For people in the Renaissance, the Goths were identified with the medieval spirit and signified a form of outdated monstrosity that lacked the finesse of classic Roman culture. The fact that the Goths were tribes that produced no written culture was considered by highbrow Renaissance literati to be indisputable evidence of Gothic primitiveness and inferiority.

There was, however, a radical shift in the use of the term during the seventeenth-century Civil War in England. During the Glorious Revolution, William of Orange became the new protestant King of England by deposing James II on grounds of his absolutist Catholicism. Through the Bill of Rights, William established parliament as the ruling power of England in order to curtail Catholic claims to the throne. In this way, he initiated not only a fundamentally modern type of state, but also, by minimizing royal intervention, the rise of the mercantile class, which later became the basis for the middle class. The supremacy and validity of the parliament was based on its historical continuity which, according to many thinkers of the time, could be traced back to a Gothic past. In this sense, while Catholicism was implicitly associated with a form of despotism, fanaticism (the inquisition) and irrationalism (belief in miracles), the Gothic came to be associated with liberty and democracy. It was considered to be the cradle of native institutions while historians of the time even considered the modern British jury system to have originated in the Goths.

This schematic overview of the term’s inception reveals some of its basic and most defining characteristics that will be an integral part of the term for centuries to come. Right from its outset “Gothic”
was a very inclusive genre and this is precisely why it was employed for a variety of purposes. It was first utilized to refer loosely to a collectivity of barbaric tribes of no specific historical, cultural or geographic origin. In other words, from its origin the term was used as a broad, vague and flexible cluster term that could incorporate within its bay disparate or even conflicting ideas and traits. As David Punter argues in his seminal study of the genre *The Literature of Terror* (1980), ambivalence as a form of transgression has been one of the most defining characteristics of the Gothic. And, it is precisely this indefinite character of the term that accounts for its persistence, adaptability and mysteriousness.

Another issue that became prominent right from the start was that the term engulfed, as one of its key features, a relationship with the past. From the vantage point of the Renaissance, the term signaled barbaric medieval crudeness that had nothing to do with classical order, harmony and refinement; it represented what the present had to escape from in order to advance. From a different vantage point, the very same term was utilized to indicate braveness, nobility, democracy, rationality, order and Englishness. In this case, primitiveness was obviously invested with positive qualities that highlighted racial, national and Protestant continuity and superiority against superstitious French Catholicism. This was precisely why the British statesman Edmund Burke persistently associated the Gothic with chivalric ideals throughout his political pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) in his effort to differentiate native Englishness from the French temperament which he associated with chaos and anarchy. The Gothic, in other words, involved a form of relation with the past employed to define the present.

*Image 1.3 The exterior of Peterborough Cathedral; An example of Gothic architecture.*
The ideological and political implications of the way the Gothic was employed to interpret the past can be clearly seen in the eighteenth-century reception of Middle Age architecture. Certain eighteenth-century thinkers, like Edmund Burke or William Stukeley, associated the ancient monuments scattered throughout Britain with the invasion of Britain by the Goths and, in doing, so managed to establish a connecting line from Stonehenge to the ruins of medieval abbeys or monasteries and contemporary cathedrals in order to highlight the common Gothic heritage of England and Scotland. Many writers and poets in their turn were inspired by these ruins and the patriotic mythology they evoked in order to describe, or even prescribe, what they considered to be a glorious past.

3. Towards a Gothic Sensibility

So far we have regarded “Gothic” as a historical, political, ideological and racial term. Before turning to the first major eighteenth-century Gothic novels, however, let us briefly consider certain factors that paved the way towards the formation of a Gothic sensibility and aesthetic upon which these first novels rested.

3.1 Ballads

Ballads were oral narrative songs that focused on tragic or dramatic events, the origin of which could be traced back to French Medieval songs. These popular folk-songs were not only full of supernatural conventions and devices such as, fairies, elves, princes, and witches, but also contained scenes of explicit violence. The emphasis on suffering and death that these songs foregrounded helped develop a sense of physicality and materiality, which was deeply amoral and subversive in its essence, and which the Gothic fully embraced.

3.2 Elizabethan Drama

Elizabethan drama decisively contributed to the formation and development of a Gothic aesthetic. Drawing on the tradition of Revenge Tragedy, many Elizabethan plays staged violent crimes, deviant sexualities, madness and ghostly apparitions. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600-1601) is indicative of this trend. It establishes, right from the first two lines, a climate of suspicion and suspense, where uncertainty and doubt are the existential equivalents of a macabre sequence of events and images that are associated with incest, madness, graveyards, poisonings, haunting ghosts, countless murders and a dejected prince holding a skull in his hand, set against a nation in full disorder and decay. From *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1594-1595), to *King Lear* (1605-1610), and from *Othello* to the *Tempest* (1611), Shakespeare utilized a wide array of supernatural conventions as stage and plot devices to seize the audience’s imagination. Even though Shakespeare was not alone in the employment of these pre-Gothic devices, he popularized them to a great extent, given the position that he has occupied throughout the centuries in the canon of English literature and culture.

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**Augustan Literature:**

The term alludes to eighteenth-century English literature. It was called Augustan because it imitated the ideals of Classical Rome as they flourished during the reign of emperor Augustus through Virgil and Horace. Apart from neoclassicism, other ideals that were favoured were harmony, balance, universality and formal strictness. The major writers of this period were Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Jonathan Swift and Joseph Addison.
3.3 Graveyard Poetry

The Gothic is also prefigured in the works of a group of eighteenth-century poets that included, among others, Thomas Gray, Robert Blair, Edward Young, James Hervey, Thomas Warton, William Collins, Thomas Parnell, who are also known as graveyard poets. This school of poetry attacked Augustan decorum, restraint and rationality, by employing a discourse of intense emotions in order to express anxiety about human limitation and the futility of life. Their *memento mori* stance was suggested through motifs that involved darkness, tombs, medieval ruins, ghosts and melancholy.

3.4 The Sublime

Edmund Burke’s treatise on the sublime in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) played a very significant role in the development and spread of Romanticism but also of the Gothic, because it theoretically validated this emerging sensibility. Following Longinus, Burke claimed that, unlike the concept of the beautiful, which evokes pleasure when being contemplated, the sublime generates feelings of awe and terror; it involves something attractive, yet of such intensity, extent or magnitude that the human faculties fail to fully comprehend, and this, in its turn, generates feelings of pain. The overwhelming mixture of pleasure and pain that one feels while considering the imposing grandeur of medieval architecture, the vastness of the galaxy, the concept of God, or even the view from Mont Blanc, is indicative of what Burke had in mind. The sublime, thus, was the aesthetics of infinity, incomprehension and terror and comprised the darker other of Enlightenment reason and optimism. Burke’s discussion, furthermore, was one of the first attempts to find a language that would represent fear and to consider the role of absence, the irrational, and transience in the formation of subjectivity.

The above elements were disparate threats that the Gothic brought together giving them new shape and meaning, as we shall see. As such, it could be argued that the Ballads, Elizabethan drama, Graveyard poetry and Burke’s theory of the Sublime carried, in embryonic form, what would later develop into a distinct, an easily recognizable literary tradition; they were the pre-cursors of the Gothic.
4. Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto

Image 1.5 This is the first page of Walpole’s 1764 edition.
Horace Walpole, the son of the Whig Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, played a decisive role in the development of the Gothic as a genre. This is not only due to the fact that he published in 1764 the founding Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, which was a best-seller, but also because he was responsible for initiating the Gothic revival in architecture by redecorating and reconstructing his house in Strawberry Hill according to the medieval Gothic style. It is no wonder then that most genealogies of the Gothic begin with Horace Walpole.

When the prince of Otranto, Manfred’s son, dies before his wedding when a gigantic helmet falls on his head, Manfred sends his wife to a convent and decides to marry his son’s unwilling bride, Isabella, fearing that he will lose the castle should he not ensure a new heir as a mysterious prophecy dictates. Isabella attempts to escape Manfred by entering the subterranean vaults of the castle and is helped by Theodore, who is the son that he will lose the castle should he not ensure a new heir as a mysterious prophecy dictates. Isabella attempts to escape Manfred by entering the subterranean vaults of the castle and is helped by Theodore, who is the son that he will lose the castle should he not ensure a new heir as a mysterious prophecy dictates. Isabella attempts to escape Manfred by entering the subterranean vaults of the castle and is helped by Theodore, who is the son that he will lose the castle should he not ensure a new heir as a mysterious prophecy dictates.

The Castle of Otranto is the first Gothic novel to have brought together disparate earlier elements and shaped them into an identifiable and groundbreaking form. Moreover, this is a novel in which one can easily detect in germinal form what will later get to be the stock devices of the genre. Thus, a closer look at the novel’s early Gothic machinery will help us better understand this nascent genre.

One of these Gothic devices can be detected from the title page of the first edition of the book (image 1.5), where it is stated that the story has been translated by William Marshal and, as the preface adds, this is a translation of a manuscript written in 1529 by Onuphrio Muralto, yet, set at the time of the Crusades, between 1095 and 1243. This device of the discovered manuscript, which has ever since been imitated by many Gothic writers, was actually also employed by Cervantes in *Don Quixote* (1605), which, according to many scholars, comprises one of the earliest novelistic forms. It is not accidental that both one of the first novels and also one of the first Gothic novels rely on this narrative technique. The device of framed narratives marks a break with earlier artistic forms, since it foregrounds a more complex relation with the past. In the case of Cervantes, it seeks to transubstantiate the earlier romance into a realistic present, while in the case of Walpole, the linearity of history is implicitly under question through a framed narrative that brings together past and present. Furthermore, this device establishes a form of temporal distance that enables the readers to safely enjoy the narrative since it is supposed to belong to an exotic, barbaric and Catholic past that could not possibly threaten the reader’s advanced present. This intricate handling of the past subsequently implies a more sophisticated and elaborate worldview that highlights the novelty and modernity of both debut forms. This is precisely why Ian Watt, one of the most influential critics and historians of the novel, calls the Gothic a sort of a contradiction in terms since it means the “old new” (158).

In the preface to the second edition, however, Walpole states that his book is an attempt to blend the traditions of romance and novel writing in order to overcome the shortcomings of both: the naïve reliance of romance on improbable supernaturalism, on the one hand, and the realistic rigidity and pragmatism of the novel, on the other. In his attempt to legitimize this mixture, Walpole alludes to Shakespeare’s work where imagination and reality are perfectly fused. While doing so, Walpole also changes the subtitle of his book from “A Story” to “A Gothic Story,” probably seizing the opportunity that the term “Gothic” allowed him to incorporate contradictory terms, as we have already noted. Thus, this blend of the two genres initiated a rational outlook on the supernatural, which is probably why most supernatural occurrences in the novel appear too far fetched to induce terror but are rather ludicrous: murder by a large helmet falling from the sky, a statue that bleeds or a painting that sighs and walks. Such truthfulness and matter-of-factness, indicated from the first lines of the novel, is also evident in the coherence and pace of the story from which suspense derives.

Moreover, whereas the preface to the first edition locates the novel in the distant past by presenting it as a medieval romance, the preface to the second edition, arguing for a new form of writing, essentially brings the novel closer to the present. Walpole achieves this by emphasizing the fact that the improbable incidents of his novel can be read realistically as well, as covered allegories of psychological states or political situations that implicitly allude to the present. Many critics claim that Walpole was influenced in this shift by the literary trend, that was prominent at the time, of interpreting and understanding medieval romances as dealing in coded form with historical anxieties of the time. This twist, as such, initiates a determining characteristic of the genre, according to which Gothic narratives appear to be discussing serious problems in disguised form. Thus, despite the fact that many Gothic stories are set in an exotic faraway past and involve improbable
characters and events, they are actually systematically engaged, in veiled form, with realist or present conditions and plights.

Another characteristic Gothic device we find in Walpole’s novel involves the genre’s typology of stock characters. Through its protagonist, Manfred, the novel launches a type of villain, the despotic tyrant, who will dominate subsequent Gothic narratives. Many critics have read Manfred’s tyrannical attitude and his story of succession and usurpation within a political and ideological framework. A medieval castle, after all, is a setting with strong political connotations and symbolisms. So, the novel could be seen as a story of an abusive aristocrat finally being overthrown by Theodore, who does not only happen to be the rightful owner of the castle, but is also sketched as a modernized type of an aristocrat. As such, the story can be read as a critique of aristocratic abuse and excess, where the old-fashioned feudal aristocracy is presented as a remnant of the past that haunts and thwarts modern bourgeois aspirations. In a similar vein, as some critics claim, Manfred’s portrayal can be seen as implicitly alluding to James Stuart’s despotic and superstitious Catholicism, which was brought down by the far more liberal and Protestant William of Orange. In this light, the revelation that the medieval castle rightfully belongs to Theodore seems to be fully in tune with early eighteenth-century attempts to reclaim the Gothic past and, thus, establish a form of historical continuity that is meant to reinforce patriotism.

This specific type of villain can also, quite interestingly, be found in one of the earliest novels in England, Samuel Richardson’s Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded (1740), which is a detailed account of the numerous attempts made by a mischievous master to seduce his young and innocent servant. Of course, Mr. B is not as malevolent as Manfred, since Pamela manages in the end to change him and morally educate him; yet it is clear that the first Gothic novel relied more or less on the same plotline that one of the first English novels also did, which is symptomatic of the close affiliation existing between them. Thus, having been born at more or less the same time as the novel, from its very beginning the Gothic became its dark other. Unlike the novel, however, which in its inception aggressively defined itself against older traditions, such as the epic and the romance, the Gothic welcomed them. Unlike the realist novel, moreover, which was preoccupied with the factual, the particular, the familiar, and the present, the Gothic turned its attention towards the exotic, the extraordinary, the unfamiliar, and the past.
The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which grating on the rusty hinges were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror;—yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her. She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave,—yet frequently stopped and listened to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw any body to her assistance—Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind;—if Manfred knew where she was, he must have followed her: she was still in one of the cloisters, and the steps she had heard were too distinct to proceed from the way she had come. Cheered with this reflection, and hoping to find a friend in whoever was not the prince; she was going to advance, when a door that stood ajar, at some distance to the left, was opened gently; but ere her lamp, which she held up, could discover who opened it, the person recreated precipitately on seeing the light.

Isabella, whom every incident was sufficient to dismay, hesitated whether she should proceed. Her dread of Manfred outweighed every other terror. The very circumstance of the person avoiding her, gave her a sort of courage. It could only be, she thought, some domestic belonging to the castle. Her gentleness had never raised her an enemy, and conscious innocence made her hope that, unless sent by the prince’s order to seek her, his servants would rather assist than prevent her flight. Fortifying herself with these reflections, and believing, by what she could observe, that she was near the mouth of the subterraneous cavern, she approached the door that had been opened; but a sudden gust of wind that met her at the door extinguished her lamp, and left her in total darkness.

Words cannot paint the horror of the princess’s situation. Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred, and far from tranquil on knowing she was within reach of some body, she knew not whom, for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts, all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions. She addressed herself to every saint in heaven, and inwardly implored their assistance. For a considerable time she remained in an agony of despair. At last as softly as was possible, she fell for the door, and, having found it, entered trembling into the vault from whence she had heard the sigh and steps. It gave her a kind of momentary joy to perceive an imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleam from the roof of the vault, which seemed to be fallen in, and from where hung a fragment of earth or building, she could not distinguish which, that appeared to have been crushed inwards. She advanced eagerly towards this chasm, when she discerned a human form standing close against the wall.

She shrieked, believing it the ghost of her betrothed Conrad. The figure advancing, said in a submissive voice, “Be not alarmed lady; I will not injure you.” Isabella, a little encouraged by the words and tone of voice of the stranger, and recollecting that this must be the person who had opened the door, recovered her spirits enough to reply, “Sir, whoever you are, take pity on a wretched princess standing on the brink of destruction: assist me to escape from this fatal castle, or in a few moments I may be made miserable for ever.” “Alas!” said the stranger, “what can I do to assist you? I will die in your defence; but I am unacquainted with the castle, and want”—“Oh!” said Isabella, hastily interrupting him, “help me but to find a trap-door that must be hereabout, and it is the greatest service you can do me; for I have not a minute
to lose.” Saying these words she felt about on the pavement, and directed the stranger to search likewise for a smooth piece of brass inclosed in one of the stones. “That,” said she, “is the lock, which opens with a spring, of which I know the secret. If I can find that, I may escape—if not, alas, courteous stranger, I fear I shall have involved you in my misfortunes: Manfred will suspect you for the accomplice of my flight, and you will fall a victim to his resentment.” “I value not my life, said the stranger; and it will be some comfort to lose it in trying to deliver you from his tyranny.” “Generous youth,” said Isabella, “how shall I ever requite”—As she uttered these words, a ray of moonshine streaming through a cranny of the ruin above shone directly on the lock they sought—“Oh, transport!” said Isabella, “here is the trap-door!” and taking out a key, she touched the spring, which starting aside discovered an iron ring. “Lift up the door,” said the princess. The stranger obeyed; and beneath appeared some stone steps descending into a vault totally dark. “We must go down here,” said Isabella: “follow me; dark and dismal as it is, we cannot miss our way; it leads directly to the church of Saint Nicholas”—“But perhaps,” added the princess modestly, “you have no reason to leave the castle, nor have I farther occasion for your service; in a few minutes I shall be safe from Manfred’s rage—only let me know to whom I am so much obliged.” “I will never quit you,” said the stranger eagerly. “till I have placed you in safety—not think me, princess, more generous than I am; though you are my principal care”—The stranger was interrupted by a sudden noise of voices that seemed approaching, and they soon distinguished these words: “Talk not to me of necromancers; I tell you she must be in the castle; I will find her in spite of enchantment.” “Oh, heavens!” cried Isabella, “it is the voice of Manfred! Make haste, or we are ruined! and shut the trap-door after you.” Saying this, she descended the steps precipitately; and as the stranger hastened to follow her, he let the door slip out of his hands; it fell and the spring closed over it.

5. The Female Gothic of Ann Radcliffe


Image 1.7 Catherine Reading The Mysteries of Udolpho (1833), artist unknown.
Another influential trendsetter of the Gothic is Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe, born the year Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, is one of the most popular first generation Gothic writers. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), one of her most successful novels, moves, like most of her stories, along the paradigm set by Walpole: it involves a story of usurpation with a well hidden family secret taking place in a medieval Southern European setting with remote and mysterious castles that suggest Catholic superstition. A villainous aristocrat is usually after a virtuous innocent girl without success, however, because in the end virtue always prevails.

Where this novel really stands out in terms of its predecessors is in the unique way supernatural elements are resolved in the narrative. The mysteries of Udolpho are always much simpler and far more innocent than what Emily St. Aubert, the orphaned heroine of the novel, initially takes them to be. This is why, from the start of the novel, Emily’s father warns her about the dangers of overindulging into exaggerating sentimentalism. Radcliffe’s infamous use of prolonged suspense and suggestive atmosphere draw the reader, along with the heroine, into imaginative speculation, which is eventually undermined. In an anticlimactic way, through the use of rationalist explanation, things are safely put back to where they initially were. Indicative of this pattern is the scene in which Emily, while burning a mysterious manuscript, reads a sentence from it that triggers her wildest fears. Speculating the meaning of these words and re-interpreting certain past events, she reaches the terrifying conclusion that she is an illegitimate child, which, of course, as the story establishes, is definitely not the case. The potential threat of a dark secret about her lineage, thus, is turned into a means of re-establishing familial and domestic order.

In doing so, Radcliffe does not only affiliate the Gothic with the then dominant rationalist mode, but also aligns it with the cult of sensibility, which involves the portrayal of over-sentimental and over-emotional characters, whose excessive sensibility is a sign of refinement, innocence and virtue. By bringing these seemingly contradictory trends together, in a fashion similar to Walpole’s blend of the old and the new romance, Radcliffe manages to have rationalism control excessive passion as a potential disruptive force that can overthrow enlightened order. By restoring reason and the middle class domestic values of her heroine, Radcliffe assigns to the Gothic a moral content which it seems to lack. In this respect, her stories resemble Samuel Richardson’s moralism in *Pamela* (1740) or *Clarissa* (1748-1749), where innocent and over-sentimental young girls are eventually rewarded for remaining virtuous. It is precisely because of this emphasis on chastity that Radcliffe turns the Gothic from a morally questionable into a serious genre and manages to evade social criticism and become a very popular and successful author.

Unlike, however, Richardson’s heroines, Radcliffe’s are not solely confined into private spaces, but occupy the public sphere as well in their effort to get away from threatening suitors. Struggling to surmount the perils that the narrative subjects her into, Emily is exposed to a series of sublime settings that are usually associated with male heroes coming from the picaresque tradition, and in the end manages to surpass obstacles by relying on her own self. In other words, Radcliffe’s heroines both participate in the conventional domestic morality fit for women, and also suggest an unconventional conception of female subjectivity that is an indispensable part of open, communal life. In their attempt to escape the imposing castles of patriarchal

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**Sensibility:**

The notion of sensibility was closely connected with eighteenth-century philosophy and literature, and involved the display of emotions and emotionality as an indication of social rank. This tradition of the excess of feeling was soon ridiculed and parodied by its opponents. A typical example of a critique urged against this early tradition was Jane Austen’s novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

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**Picaresque Novel:**

The Picaresque tradition is considered one of the earliest novelistic forms; it involved the adventures and journeys of a picaro, that is a low-class character. The fact that the hero was a marginal character, made these narratives maintain an ironic distance towards the frivolities and follies of the society of the time. This genre developed in 16th-century Spain and Cervantes incorporated some of its elements in his masterpiece *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615). This tradition also influenced early English novelists: Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742).
tyranny, these heroines enter misty, supernatural labyrinths, overcome hardships and reemerge out in the light not only with a newly defined self but also with a language of their own, able to articulate female experience.

The Gothic was, after all, one of the first genres that attracted female authors who wrote about and for a predominantly middle class reading public. Ellen Moers, in her seminal study *Literary Women* (1977), talks about a “female Gothic,” to refer to the tradition established by Anna Laetitia Aikin (or Mrs. Barbauld), Charlotte Smith, Harriet & Sophia Lee, Eliza Parsons, Maria Regina Roche, to name but a few. In the works of all these women writers, there is a permeating pattern of an innocent heroine, oppressed by a figure of patriarchal authority, who tries to reclaim her rightful private domain, a room of her own, and her right to self-definition. Gothic conventions were utilized by these writers in order not only to denote female plight but also to suggest the mystery, awe and pain that this new uncharted territory of female condition generated. The mistiness of Gothic tropes reflects the agonies and struggles female authors had to go through, since the only language available at the time, the language of patriarchy, could not encapsulate the emotions and thoughts of women who wanted to express their dissatisfaction with it.

It comes as no surprise then that the Gothic captured at the time the female imaginary to the extent that it did. Through the language of emotion and the decorum of sensibility, women of all ranks could both identify with these poor Gothic heroines and also be implicitly taught how to control the disruptive forces inherent in their feelings. This is precisely the theme of Jane Austen’s parody of the genre in *Northanger Abbey*, a novel she began writing in 1798, when the Gothic was at its heyday, but published in 1818. Catherine Morland’s dream of becoming like one of the popular and fashionable heroines of Gothic fiction is about to come true when she is invited to stay in a friendly estate. To the heroine’s dismay, however, Northanger Abbey has no hidden manuscripts or secrets to reveal and there is no mystery in its owner’s death. Like Don Quixote, whose perception of the world is shaped by the tradition of romance, Catherine is deeply influenced by the conventions of Gothic fiction, revealing the extent to which this form of literature was popular at the time for middle class women. Just like Radcliffe, Austen seeks to control this emotional excess through parody as a means of maintaining a rationalist integrity, synonymous with middle class morality. That is why, in her novel, excessive emotionalism is considered non-English; it is associated with foreign mentality and a specific historic event that was threatening for England at the time of the French Revolution.

*Image 1.8 Illustration from* The Mysteries of Udolpho, 1830 edition.
Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

**Volume 2, Chapter 5**

_In this extract we witness Emily’s reactions as evil Montoni approaches his castle._

Towards the close of day, the road wound into a deep valley. Mountains, whose shaggy steeps appeared to be inaccessible, almost surrounded it. To the east, a vista opened, that exhibited the Apennines in their darkest horrors; and the long perspective of retiring summits, rising over each other, their ridges clothed with pines, exhibited a stronger image of grandeur, than any that Emily had yet seen. The sun had just sunk below the top of the mountains she was descending, whose long shadow stretched athwart the valley, but his sloping rays, shooting through an opening of the cliffs, touched with a yellow gleam the summits of the forest, that hung upon the opposite steeps, and streamed in full splendour upon the towers and battlements of a castle, that spread its extensive ramparts along the brow of a precipice above. The splendour of these illumined objects was heightened by the contrasted shade, which involved the valley below.

“There,” said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, “is Udolpho.”

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni’s; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.

The extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her mind, and she almost expected to see banditti start up from under the trees. At length, the carriages emerged upon a heathy rock, and, soon after, reached the castle gates, where the deep tone of the portal bell, which was struck upon to give notice of their arrival, increased the fearful emotions that had assailed Emily. While they waited till the servant within should come to open the gates, she anxiously surveyed the edifice: but the gloom that overspread it allowed her to distinguish little more than a part of its outline, with the massy walls of the ramparts, and to know that it was vast, ancient and dreary. From the parts she saw, she judged of the heavy strength and extent of the whole. The gateway before her, leading into the courts, was of gigantic size, and was defended by two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them. The towers were united by a curtain, pierced and embattled also, below which appeared the pointed arch of an huge portcullis, surmounting the gates: from these, the walls of the ramparts extended to other towers, overlooking the precipice, whose shattered outline, appearing on a gleam that lingered in the west, told of the ravages of war.—Beyond these all was lost in the obscurity of evening.

While Emily gazed with awe upon the scene, footsteps were heard within the gates, and the undrawing of the bolts; after which an ancient servant of the castle appeared, forcing back the huge folds of the portal, to admit his lord. As the carriage-wheels rolled heavily under the portcullis, Emily's heart sunk, and she seemed as if she was going into her prison; the gloomy court into which she passed served to confirm the idea, and her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested even more terrors than her reason could justify.
Another gate delivered them into the second court, grass-grown, and more wild than the first, where, as she surveyed through the twilight its desolation—its lofty walls, overtopped with briony, moss and nightshade, and the embattled towers that rose above,—long-suffering and murder came to her thoughts. One of those instantaneous and unaccountable convictions, which sometimes conquer even strong minds, impressed her with its horror. The sentiment was not diminished when she entered an extensive Gothic hall, obscured by the gloom of evening, which a light, glimmering at a distance through a long perspective of arches, only rendered more striking. As a servant brought the lamp nearer, partial gleams fell upon the pillars and the pointed arches, forming a strong contrast with their shadows, that stretched along the pavement and the walls.

6. The Terrors of French Revolution

Starting with the Marquis de Sade, there has been a critical tradition of considering the Gothic of the 1790s as a cultural response to the political and ideological implications of the French Revolution. As the American eighteenth century scholar Ronald Paulson argues, in *Representations of Revolution* (1983), the English expressed their anxieties about the French revolutionary events predominantly through the Gothic. The English shock about the events that followed the revolution was typically dramatized in Gothic fiction through the feelings of sublimity that young innocent heroines like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* felt, while witnessing the excessive violence, despotic oppression or unlawful acts of usurpation of continental villains like Montoni. The resolution of these tales, where domestic values were firmly reaffirmed also, became an implicit way of reminding readers of Protestant and patriotic values. The recurring Gothic setting of remote and mysterious Catholic castles, on the other hand, became a very fitting locus, which evoked not only the ills of the ancient aristocratic regime that actually brought about the revolution, but also suggested the violent deaths of French nobility that followed the outbreak of the revolution and the social upheaval and disorder that they triggered. The Revolution’s emblem was, after all, the Bastille, the castle-prison which was stormed in 1789 by an angry mob, thus initiating the Revolution.

The literary illustration of this scene is nowhere more evident than in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, probably the most scandalous of all early Gothic novels, which was published in 1796, three years after *Udolpho*. *The Monk* has nothing to do with Radcliffe’s artful suggestiveness. Lewis’ narrative resembles the Gothic setting of a labyrinth, where many plotlines, characters, intertextual allusions become the background against which a series of illicit passions and unspeakable vices are sensationalized; incest, cross-dressing, diabolism, sacrilege, desecration, rape, mutilation, dismembering, murder, and matricide, are only some of the disturbances that Lewis’ book contains. When, towards the end of the novel, the atrocities taking place at the Priory of St. Clare are revealed, an angry group of people rushes to destroy the convent and tear its tyrannical abbess to pieces. Lewis’ diction in this scene, which highlights the threatening frenzy of the mob, seems to be accurately reflecting the terror of the storming of the Bastille, rendering this scene one of the most discussed parts of the book. According to the Marquis de Sade, Lewis’ fiction was “the fruit of the revolution of which all Europe felt the shock” (Varma 217), as he admits while discussing Radcliffe and *The Monk*.

So, both Radcliffe and Lewis are “fruits” of the revolution in the sense that they both dramatize evidently, in different ways, the dangers of uncontrolled passions and emotions. By setting these emotional excesses in Catholic Europe, they both implicitly foreground a form of rationalism which for them comprises the predominant characteristic of the English constitution, and which, they seem to believe, distinguishes the English from the Europeans. The emphasis, however, with which they also underline the necessity to control passions, by implication, indicates that the eighteenth-century belief in reason is irreversibly undermined. Thus, in their works we can find Enlightenment reason standing side by side with its opposites, imagination, sympathy and individual idiosyncrasy, all ideas associated with the outbreak of the French Revolution.
Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*

This extract from the end of the book alludes to the mob violence of the storming of Bastille.

But when [St. Ursula] related the inhuman murder of Agnes, the indignation of the mob was so audibly testified, that it was scarcely possible to hear the conclusion. The confusion increased with every moment; at length a multitude of voices exclaimed, that the Prioress should be given up to their fury. To this Don Ramirez refused to consent positively. Even Lorenzo bade the people remember, that she had undergone no trial, and advised them to leave her punishment to the Inquisition. All representations were fruitless; the disturbance grew still more violent, and the populace more exasperated. In vain did Ramirez attempt to convey his prisoner out of the throng. Wherever he turned, a band of rioters barred his passage, and demanded her being delivered over to them more loudly than before. Ramirez ordered his attendants to cut their way through the multitude: oppressed by numbers, it was impossible for them to draw their swords. He threatened the mob with the vengeance of the Inquisition: But in this moment of popular phrenzy even this dreadful name had lost its effect […] They forced a passage through the guards who protected their destined victim, dragged her from her shelter, and proceeded to take upon her a most summary and cruel vengeance. Wild with terror, and scarcely knowing what she said, the wretched woman shrieked for a moment’s mercy: She protested that she was innocent of the death of Agnes, and could clear herself from the suspicion beyond the power of doubt. The rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance. They refused to listen to her: they showed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. They tore her one from another, and each new tormentor was more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and excreations her shrill cries for mercy; and dragged her through the streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate of vindictive fury could invent.

This extract is typical of the anti-Catholicism that permeates Gothic narratives.

The Nuns were employed in religious duties established in honour of St. Clare, and to which no proflane was ever admitted. The chapel windows were illuminated. As they stood on the outside, the auditors heard the full swell of the organ, accompanied by a chorus of female voices, rise upon the stillness of the night. This died away, and was succeeded by a single strain of harmony. It was the voice of her who was destined to sustain in the procession the characters of St. Clare. For the office the most beautiful Virgin of Madrid was always selected, and she upon whom the choice fell, esteemed it as the highest of honours. While listening to the music, whose melody distance only seemed to render sweeter, the audience was wrapped up in profound attention. Universal silence prevailed through the crowd, and every heart was filled with reverence for religion. Every heart but Lorenzo’s. Conscious that among those who chanted the praises of their God so sweetly, there were some who cloaked with devotion the foulest sins, their hymns inspired him with detestation at their hypocrisy. He had long observed with disapprobation and contempt the superstition, which governed Madrid’s inhabitants. His good sense had pointed out to him the artifices of the monks, and the gross absurdity of their miracles, wonders and supposititious reliques. He blushed to see his countrymen the dupes of deceptions so ridiculous, and only wished for an opportunity to free them from their monkish fetters. That opportunity, so long desired in vain, was at length presented to him. He resolved not to let it slip, but to set before the people in glaring colours, how enormous were the abuses but too frequently practiced in monasteries, and how unjustly public esteem was bestowed indiscriminately upon all who wore a religious habit. He longed for the moment destined to unmask the hypocrites, and convince his countrymen, that a sanctified exterior does not always hide a virtuous heart.
By presenting emotions and passions as uncontrollable, and by surrendering to their sublime energy, *The Monk* seems to be indirectly aligning itself with the Romantic distrust of Enlightenment reason, as we have seen. Romanticism was, after all, an early nineteenth-century movement that also grew as a direct response to the French Revolution. Romantic and Gothic aesthetics, as such, overlapped to a great extent; and for some critics, Gothicism is considered to be an integral part of Romanticism. They both embraced the sublime, and foregrounded the role of imagination and emotion; they both relied on, yet decisively modified, the conventions of medieval romance as a means of exploring the human psyche and the irrational; they both promoted, either through their heroes or through their villains, individual uniqueness and rebelliousness; and, last but not least, they were both preoccupied with the past.

Thus, William Blake, the unconventional early Romantic visionary poet and illustrator, incorporated revolutionary imagery in his work in ways affiliated with the Gothic. In his poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), a leading figure of British Romanticism, employed a form of supernatural machinery that heavily drew on Gothic tradition (the sailor-zombies, the Life-in-Death figure, the weird shinning of the sailor’s eyes, etc). Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), one of the most rebellious Romantic idealists, wrote the Gothic romances *Irvyne* (1808-9) and *Zastrozzi* (1810). Lord Byron (1788-1824), one of the most influential Romantic poets, alluded in his satiric poem *Don Juan* (1819-24) to the tradition established by Radcliffe and Lewis. John Keats (1795-1821), a major Romantic poet, in his poem “La Belle Dame sans Merci” (1820), is based on a scene from *The Monk*. Finally, artists like Henry Fuseli and...
Caspar David Friedrich heavily drew on Gothic conventions in their work. Fuseli’s *The Nightmare*, as a matter of fact, has become emblematic of nineteenth-century Gothicism.

It was precisely due to this affiliation with Romanticism that the Gothic underwent a major, probably the most significant shift in the early nineteenth century. This change basically involved the internalization of Gothic norms, according to which traditional Gothic devices were meant to invoke individual inner states. The work that paradigmatically encapsulates this change is definitely Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* which she wrote at the early age of 19 and which was initially published in 1818 and then extensively revised in 1831. Mary was, after all, in direct contact with Romantic sensibility; she was married to Percy Shelley and knew in person most of the major Romantics, while her parents were two of the most influential intellectuals of the time, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

At the heart of Shelley’s story lies the Romantic preoccupation with nature. But she adds a dark twist while probing this characteristically Romantic fascination. This is achieved through Frankenstein’s Promethean oeuvre to replace God, which of course, echoes the radical secularization of the time, as God’s throne was violently usurped by science. Thus, Victor is not only a modern god but also a modern demon. Through this figure, Shelley has created the archetype of the mad scientist that is still even nowadays replicated in so many Gothic narratives. By playing god, Victor Frankenstein spawned not only a monster but actually a new species: modern uncertainty thriving on alienation and disillusionment. Being the dark other of scientific and technological progress, the creature transcends and questions conventions of the “natural” in the sense that it is composed of living human matter, which, nevertheless, in its totality remains disturbingly unnatural. By consistently illustrating the monster as being more humane than the people it gets in touch with, Shelley manages to blur the romantic distinctions between nature and culture and eventually dramatize modern anxiety and fear at the dawn of a new world. If human life could be replicated and reproduced so easily by bringing together different limbs and parts, then humanity could not be that important and unique after all. Moreover, by having “created” the creature, Victor does not only usurp God’s place but also motherhood, blurring in this way gender distinctions and “natural” roles.

Shelley’s story is frightening because it synthesizes, as Romantic imagination does, diverse, opposite elements: fact and fiction, life and death, subject and object, nature and culture, science and metaphysics or art, etc. In doing so, she strategically presents the familiar in an unfamiliar light, which is actually a forecast of Freud’s theory of the uncanny that first appeared in 1919. While studying the meaning and the etymology of the word “uncanny” (das Unheimliche in German, meaning the un-homely), Freud noticed that the term incorporated opposing meanings. According to Freud, this linguistic vagueness implicit in the term is indicative of the fact that the feeling of the uncanny is generated when something lies between the explicable and the inexplicable, between the known and the unknown. This happens when something that we are certain we know is actually unknown, or when we realize that something we believe we do not know is actually something we knew but had forgotten about. This sense of uncertainty that pervades our perception of the world makes all things questionable and terrifying. That is why the uncanny can be seen as a synonym of uncertainty and of the repressed, or of something forgotten that still haunts the present and threatens to disrupt it.

According to Terry Castle, one of the most influential American scholars of the eighteenth-century and gender studies, the feeling of the uncanny originates in the eighteenth-century attempt to rationalize the irrational. Such attempts are evident in Radcliffe’s “explained supernatural” or in Shelley’s scientific account of what might initially appear to be supernatural. An extreme form of rationalism, Castle implies, might lead to the alienation of the faculty of imagination, which ends up being estranged from reason and then repressed. As imagination is an integral part of our brain and of the way we perceive the world, if we try to do away with it, this will only lead to malfunction and distortion. Moreover, when imagination finds an outlet, it will violently rush out and this violence comes in proportion to its repression. Castle’s remarks not
only present the historical and cultural implications of the uncanny but also help see history itself as the uncanny, as that which is repressed but always returns and haunts the present, a point we shall return to later in this chapter.

Image 1.10 Gustave Doré’s Illustration for Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1876).
Here is an extract from Keats’ “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (1820), which evokes a Gothic atmosphere.

I.
O WHAT can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
   Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither’d from the lake,
   And no birds sing.

II.
O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms!
   So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel’s granary is full,
   And the harvest’s done.

III.
I see a lily on thy brow
   With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
   Fast withereth too.

IV.
I met a lady in the meads,
   Full beautiful—a faery’s child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
   And her eyes were wild.

V.
I made a garland for her head,
   And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look’d at me as she did love,
   And made sweet moan.

VI.
I set her on my pacing steed,
   And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
   A faery’s song.

VII.
She found me roots of relish sweet,
   And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
   “I love thee true.”

VIII.
She took me to her elfin grot,
   And there she wept, and sigh’d fill sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

IX.

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream’d—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream’d
On the cold hill’s side.

X.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—“La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!”

XI.

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill’s side.

XII.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither’d from the lake,
And no birds sing.

8. Victorian Gothic

Image 1.11 A poster from the 1880s.
In the second part of the nineteenth century, the Gothic experienced a sort of revival in the works of writers like R. L. Stevenson, Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker, and was also used by many different authors who belonged to different literary traditions as predominantly a device that more systematically now signified psychological depth. Thus, the Gothic was diffused into sensationalism, social critique, and the ghost story as a means of addressing the domestic dramas of urbanized and industrialized centers. Even nineteenth-century realists incorporated Gothic elements into their writing, in order to dramatize the modern horrors that individuals experienced in industrialized cities. In its diffusion, expansion and contact with other genres, the Gothic unavoidably changed. Malevolent aristocrats were replaced by criminals, medieval labyrinths by dark alleys, and stories of usurpation by stories of corruption, poverty, and social injustice.

This incorporation of Gothic machinery as a means of increasing the dramatic and psychological efficiency and impact of the narrative is clearly manifested in Charles Dickens, undoubtedly the most prominent and emblematic writer of Victorian times. Dickens did not only resort to Gothic conventions and motifs to sketch the ominous signs of his times and the ill condition of England, but, continuing Radcliffe’s tradition, attached a moral end to them by utilizing them as a form of social critique. Such Gothic motifs abound in his works: the urban sceneries of Bleak House (1853) and Hard Times (1854) are explicitly Gothicized to evoke feelings of alienation and fear; in Oliver Twist (1838), the distress and agony of medieval monasteries are associated with Victorian industrial reality; in The Old Curiosity Shop (1841) and Oliver Twist, a young innocent hero or heroine are being chased by dark forces; the opening cemetery scene of Great Expectations (1860-1861), explicitly draws on Gothic conventions to create an atmosphere of mystery that reflects the obscurity surrounding the young hero’s origin; the Clennam’s family house in Little Dorrit (1855) is presented as a medieval Gothic castle that hides a dark secret of the family’s past, and so on and so forth.

Moreover, Dickens, along with other nineteenth-century writers, like Sheridan Le Fanu, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, actively participated in the popularization of the ghost story. Apart from expressing anxiety about the uncanny changes that living in a modern industrial city entailed, this concern with the ghost also conveyed nostalgia for a non-secularized, non-materialist and non-rationalized past, as A Christmas Carol (1843) very cleverly illustrated. The modernized Gothic setting was no longer related with the distant medieval past, yet it always retained its interest in the past, which was either mythologized or glorified, or domesticated as a haunting specter: a dark guilty family secret, usually having to do with some sort of low social origin or some kind of sexual secret that threatened the present. The frightening aspect of ghosts involved the fact that they intruded domestic privacy, which is the locus of the family and the familiar and, in doing so, they rendered everything unfamiliar, that is uncanny.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, therefore, the Gothic appeared as the ideal device for depicting the individual’s relation to the past and, by extension, psychological depth. Gothic machinery was, in other words, paradoxically utilized to represent psychological realism, due to the fact that it had been long associated with emotional arousal and expression. In Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights (1847), for example, the psychological portrait and passionate relationship of the two protagonists is predominantly illustrated through many allusions to Gothic conventions. Cathy’s anxiety and restlessness is dramatized through her presentation as a ghost, whereas Heathcliff’s alienation and estrangement is achieved through his implicit association with a villainous vampire figure. In Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (1847), Bertha Mason, the
madwoman in the attic, is Jane’s double, as she embodies not only Rochester’s dark past but also Jane’s fears about a possible negative outcome of her marriage.

The character of Bertha brings to the foreground the fact that the Gothic was also utilized in order to represent, towards the end of the nineteenth century, anxieties concerning the uncertainty of human identity. The Gothic was, in other words, not only a means of attributing psychological depth to the narrative, but also a way of addressing the horrors implicit in this dark internal realm, the human mind. We should not forget that the superiority of the human species was radically questioned by evolutionary theories that were prominent at the time. These theories relentlessly undermined theological conceptions about the origin of man, by highlighting a biological account of man’s descent from very low forms of life that firmly foregrounded the animalism of the human species. In this sense, the effect that Darwinian theory had on the Victorian imaginary was very uncanny indeed. It challenged what people had been taking for granted for so many years and rendered reality frighteningly unfamiliar. The evolutionary worldview scientifically proved, in a fashion similar to the Gothic, that the present could only be conceived in its relation to the past which it carried in fossilized form. A series of emerging and rising sciences at the time, like anthropology, criminology, psychology, etc., validated the nervousness that evolutionary theory had instilled about the intricate interrelations between past and present, culture and nature, civilization and savagery, order and chaos. The source of these tensions no longer occupied the public sphere but the human mind. Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is engaged precisely with the idea of disruption located within the individual’s mind rather than without. Moving along the line paved by Mary Shelley, Stevenson’s novel expresses anxiety about the fragmentation caused by modern industrialization, mechanization, alienation, specialization and science.

The uncertainty about origins, identity and the world that evolutionary theory brought about was reflected in fiction in unstable or unreliable narratorial voices or framed narratives. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, for instance, has three basic narrators: Captain Walton, who in his letters to his sister encloses Victor Frankenstein’s tale, Victor Frankenstein, who narrates the monster’s story to Walton, and the monster, whose diary is enframed in Walton’s story. Likewise, in Henry James’ novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), we have a plethora of perspectives and points of view since an anonymous narrator gave us a story that he heard from a friend of his, Douglas, which he read in a letter written to him by Douglas’ sister about a governess with whom he was in love. The coexistence of so many narrative frameworks and perspectives generates a series of conflicting interpretations on the plot or certain characters. In James’ novella the reader is left wondering about the mental state of the governess or whether she really saw the ghosts. James instills in the reader the horror that there is no single truth; we can only have multiple possible interpretations of reality.
Yannis Kanarakis

The anxiety about the instability of identity also became prominent through the preoccupation with the notions of changeability and transformation that we witness towards the end of the nineteenth century. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) foregrounds modern fragmentation by incorporating a variety of different genres and perspectives. The emphasis on transgression is best illustrated in the novel through the protagonist. Dracula defies definition by resisting stable subject positions or forms: he brings together past and present, life and death, presence and absence, humanity and animalism, horror and tenderness, fact and fiction, mythology and science. His subversive power becomes obvious through the fact that all characters he comes in contact with end up having deviant gender positions. Women become sexually insatiable and independent, while men become effeminately passive. In this, the Gothic documents *fin de siècle* anxieties about emancipated women and the degeneration of Victorian morals and norms that deviant sexual positions supposedly brought about. These Victorian anxieties involved theories of degeneration that were very much in the air at the time. As Dracula stands for these repressed sexual energies that allegedly threaten modern progress, he is destroyed in the end and order is restored.

On the other hand, the supposed collapse of male stereotypes that the book dramatizes can be seen as an expression of the anxiety concerning the imperial decline of Britain that took place towards the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, *Dracula* implicitly staged the insecurity generated by nationalist instabilities, and fears of foreign invasion. Reversely, it could also be seen as symptomatic of native guilt about the atrocities of the British Empire which, by the end of the nineteenth century, was considered by many Britons as nothing else but a vampire that had been sucking the blood of indigenous people.

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**Fin de Siècle:**
This French phrase means “the end of a century” and can also be used to allude to the end of an era. It is traditionally employed to refer to the last two decades of the Victorian era which are also the threshold to Modernism. This was a period marked by a growing sense of pessimism, decay and decline due to the fact that society was considered to be in crisis.

**Degeneration Theory:**
This was a theory expressed by Max Nordau in his very influential book *Degeneration* (1892). Nordau held that modernity was a sort of pathological disease marked by regression rather than progress. Its symptoms, he argued, were excessive description of details and symbolism, i.e., the inability to express oneself clearly.

**Aestheticism:**
Aestheticism or the art for art’s sake movement was a late nineteenth century artistic trend which held that art should be autonomous and not evaluated in moral but only in aesthetic terms. The trend has its origins in German Idealism and in French literature. In England, it was popularized by Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater and later by Oscar Wilde. This movement influenced the Modernists to a large extent.
In this extract, Lockwood is left alone in Heathcliff’s house which has a very Gothic atmosphere.

This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. “I must stop it, nevertheless!” I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, “Let me in—let me in!” “Who are you?” I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. “Catherine Linton,” it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of Linton? I had read Earnshaw twenty times for Linton); “I’m come home: I’d lost my way on the moor!” As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the
window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, “Let me in!” and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear. “How can I,” I said at length. “Let me go, if you want me to let you in,” the fingers relaxed. I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it, and stopped my ears to exclude the lamentable prayer. I seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour; yet, the instant I listened again, there was the doleful cry moaning on! “Begone!” I shouted. “I’ll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years.” It is twenty years,” mourned the voice: “twenty years. I’ve been away for twenty years!” Thereat began a feeble scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up, but could not stir a limb; and so yelled aloud, in a frenzy of fright. To my confusion, I discovered the yell was not ideal: hasty footsteps approached my chamber door; somebody pushed it open, with a vigorous hand, and a light glimmered through the squares at the top of the bed. I sat shuddering yet, and wiping the perspiration from my forehead: the intruder appeared to hesitate, and muttered to himself. “At last,” he said in a half-whisper, plainly not expecting an answer “Is anyone here?” I considered it best to confess my presence, for I knew Heathcliff’s accents, and feared he might search further if I kept quiet. With this intention, I turned and opened the panels. I shall not soon forget the effect my action produced.

Heathcliff stood near the entrance, in his shirt and trousers: with a candle dripping over his fingers, and his face as white as the wall behind him. The first creak of the oak startled him like an electric shock! The light leaped from his hold to a distance of some feet, and his agitation was so extreme that he could hardly pick it up.

“It is only your guest, sir,” I called out, desirous to spare him the humiliation of exposing his cowardice further. I had the misfortune to scream in my sleep, owing to a frightful nightmare. “I’m sorry I disturbed you.”

“Oh, God confound you, Mr. Lockwood! I wish you were at the commenced my host, setting the candle on a chair, because he found it impossible to hold it steady.” “And who showed you up to this room?” he continued, crushing his nails into the palms, and grinding his teeth to subdue the maxillary convulsions. “Who was it? I’ve a good mind to turn them out of the house this moment!”

“It was your servant, Zillah,” I replied, flinging myself on to the floor, and rapidly resuming my garments. I should not care if you did, Mr. Heathcliff; she richly deserves it. I suppose that she wanted to get another proof that the place was haunted, at my expense. Well, it is—swarming with ghosts and goblins! You have reason in shutting it up, I assure you. No one will thank you for a doze in such a den!”

“What do you mean?” asked Heathcliff, “and what are you doing? Lie down and finish out the night, since you are here; but, for Heaven’s sake! don’t repeat that horrid noise; nothing could excuse it, unless you were having your throat cut!”

From Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886)

This is the scene in which the scientist first encounters his evil double. Horror is combined with psychological depth.

I hesitated long before I put this theory to the test of practice. I knew well that I risked death; for any drug that so potently controlled and shook the very Fortress of identity, might by the least scruple of an overdose or at the least inopportunity in the moment of exhibition, utterly blot out that immaterial tabernacle which I looked to it to change. But the temptation of a discovery so singular and profound, at last overcame the suggestions of alarm. I
had long since prepared my tincture; I purchased at once, from a firm of wholesale chemists, a large quantity of a particular salt which I knew, from my experiments, to be the last ingredient required; and late one accursed night, I compounded the elements, watched them boil and smoke together in the glass, and when the ebullition had subsided, with a strong glow of courage, drank off the potion.

The most racking pangs succeeded: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death. Then these agonies began swiftly to subside, and I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a mill race in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine. I stretched out my hands, exulting in the freshness of these sensations; and in the act, I was suddenly aware that I had lost in stature.

There was no mirror, at that date, in my room; that which stands beside me as I write, was brought there later on for the very purpose of these transformations. The night, however, was far gone into the morning—the morning, black as it was, was nearly ripe for the conception of the day—the inmates of my house were locked in the most rigorous hours of slumber; and I determined, flushed as I was with hope and triumph, to venture in my new shape as far as to my bedroom. I crossed the yard, wherein the constellations looked down upon me, I could have thought, with wonder, the first creature of that sort that their unsleeping vigilance had yet disclosed to them; I stole through the corridors, a stranger in my own house; and coming to my room, I saw for the first time the appearance of Edward Hyde.

I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable. The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine tenths a life of effort, virtue and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance, I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. And in so far I was doubtless right. I have observed that when I wore the semblance of Edward Hyde, none could come near to me at first without a visible misgiving of the flesh. This, as I take it, was because all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind was pure evil.

I lingered but a moment at the mirror: the second and conclusive experiment had yet to be attempted; it yet remained to be seen if I had lost my identity beyond redemption and must flee before daylight from a house that was no longer mine; and hurrying back to my cabinet, I once more prepared and drank the cup, once more suffered the pangs of dissolution, and came to myself once more with the character, the stature and the face of Henry Jekyll.

That night I had come to the fatal cross roads. Had I approached my discovery in a more noble spirit, had I risked the experiment while under the empire of generous or pious aspirations, all must have been otherwise, and from these agonies of death and birth, I had come forth an angel instead of a fiend. The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine; it but shook the doors of the prisonhouse of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth. At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept
Yannis Kanarakis

awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde. Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair. The movement was thus wholly toward the worse.

Bram Stoker, Dracula

In this scene in Castle Dracula, Jonathan Harker encounters the seductive women that reside there and then the Count himself.

I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real—so real that now, sitting here in the broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep.

I was not alone. The room was the same, unchanged in any way since I came into it; I could see along the floor, in the brilliant moonlight, my own footsteps marked where I had disturbed the long accumulation of dust. In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for, though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me and looked at me for some time, and then whispered together. Two were dark, and had high aquiline noses like the Count, and great dark, piercing eyes, that seemed to be almost red when contrasted with the pale yellow moon. The other was fair, as fair as can be, with great, wavy masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where. All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain, but it is the truth. They whispered together, and then they all three laughed—such a silvery, musical laugh, but as hard as though the sound could never have come through the softness of human lips. It was like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand. The fair girl shook her head coquettishly, and the other two urged her on. One said:

"Go on! You are first, and we shall follow; yours is the right to begin." The other added. "He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all." I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation.

The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood.

I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white, sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer—nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat,
and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart.

But at that instant another sensation swept through me as quick as lightning. I was conscious of the presence of the Count, and of his being as if lapped in a storm of fury. As my eyes opened involuntarily I saw his strong hand grasp the slender neck of the fair woman and with giant’s power draw it back, the blue eyes transformed with fury, the white teeth champing with rage, and the fair cheeks blazing red with passion. But the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury even in the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid, as if the flames of hell-fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale, and the lines of it were hard like drawn wires; the thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal. With a fierce sweep of his arm, he hurled the woman from him, and then motioned to the others, as though he were beating them back; it was the same imperious gesture that I had seen used to the wolves. In a voice which, though low and almost a whisper, seemed to cut through the air and then ring round the room, he exclaimed:

“How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me.” The fair girl, with a laugh of ribald coquetry, turned to answer him:

“You yourself never loved; you never love!” On this the other women joined, and such a mirthless, hard, soulless laughter rang through the room that it almost made me faint to hear; it seemed like the pleasure of fiends. The Count turned, after looking at my face attentively, and said in a soft whisper:

“Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so? Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him, you shall kiss him at your will. Now go! go! I must awaken him, for there is work to be done.”

“Are we to have nothing tonight?” said one of them, with a low laugh, as she pointed to the bag which he had thrown upon the floor, and which moved as though there were some living thing within it. For answer he nodded his head. One of the women jumped forward and opened it. If my ears did not deceive me there was a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child. The women closed round, whilst I was aghast with horror but as I looked they disappeared, and with them the dreadful bag. There was no door near them, and they could not have passed me without my noticing. They simply seemed to fade into the rays of the moonlight and pass out through the window, for I could see outside the dim, shadowy forms for a moment before they entirely faded away.

Then the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious.
9. Modernist Gothic

The diffusion of the Gothic into other genres and cultural modes was carried on in the twentieth century. Gothic elements can be traced both in modernist fiction and other popular cultural forms, like cinema and television, and from mid-twentieth century on, the Gothic basically continued to flourish in the domain of popular culture, as we shall see.

When it comes to twentieth century fiction, traces of the Gothic can be detected in nearly all major modernist texts. Modernism marked a new register of the Gothic which was now utilized as one literary convention among others in the service of the modernist agenda. It can be argued that during Modernism the Gothic in essence turned from a genre into a literary effect which, nevertheless, maintained a strong presence throughout the literary masterpieces of Modernist tradition. Quite indicatively, the opening poem that W. B. Yeats selected in order to celebrate and illustrate the new Modernist spirit in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (1936) was actually a celebrated extract from Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873). Here, Mona Lisa is presented by Pater as an undead vampire, a Gothic primordial femme fatale. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joseph Conrad illustrates the horrors not only of the western imperialist expedition in the area of Congo, but also the grotesque darkness of a repressed primeval past that threatens to overthrow civilization. In *The Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), James Joyce, the priest of high modernism, presents the catholic clergy in a light that seems to be sarcastically drawing on the Gothic formula of the corrupt monk who is after the innocent youth. T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) incorporated an army of Gothic conventions into its highly fragmentary form in order to portray modern alienation, impoverishment and sterility. This existentialist anxiety was further elaborated through an explicit Gothic idiom in Franz Kafka’s work. His *Metamorphosis* (1916) involved the story of a man who
turned into an insect in order to address the issue of self-loathing implicit in modern alienation, whereas *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926) invoked the suffocation that contemporary individuals feel when having to faced with the labyrinth of modern bureaucracy or the impenetrable castle of law. In America, the novelist William Faulkner employs a series of Gothic devices in order to portray the uncanny feeling that contemporary lifestyle generates, while Eudora Welty and Flannery O’Connor, in their turn, present the problematics of female identity and sexuality set against a Southern American patriarchal rule through Gothic diction and imagery.

![Image 1.14 The original 1927 poster for Langs’ Metropolis.](Image 1.14 The original 1927 poster for Langs’ Metropolis.)

However, there were also writers who were more systematically occupied with the Gothic in the beginning of the twentieth century. The masterful ghost stories of the medievalist scholar M. R. James, which are considered as probably the most influential in the genre, exploited nearly all Gothic conventions, from haunted houses and castles, to lost manuscripts, apparitions from the past, and the occult. Yet, unlike Dickens’ ghosts, James’ ghosts are always malignant. Stories like “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-Book” (1895), “The Ash-Tree” (1904), “The Tractate Middoth” (1911) contain sharply shocking scenes and narratives that, unlike Radcliffe’s, leave things unexplained and do not seek to contain the supernatural within a moral end. On the
other hand, the American author H. P. Lovecraft coined a whole new supernatural mythology, the Cthulhu Mythos, about a world existing in a parallel universe which constantly disrupts conventional reality. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, the Gothic fell into critical disfavor. Two of the most important critics of the time, Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) and, later on, her husband F. R. Leavis, in *Revaluation* (1956), attacked and condemned the Gothic. They considered it a genre unworthy of any serious consideration due to the fact that it resorts to unoriginal clichés and conventions.

The Leavises harshly criticized the Gothic due to its affiliation with mainstream and popular cultural forms. The association established between the Gothic and pop culture became even stronger at the time of their critique. After having accommodated nearly all narrative forms, the Gothic appropriated the new mediums that emerged in the twentieth century, namely, the radio, cinema and television, as they afforded so many new sensationalist possibilities to be explored. During the golden age of the radio, for example, there were many horror radio series in the States, such as *The Witch’s Tale* (1931-1938), *Lights Out* (1934-1947) and *Stay Tuned for Terror* (1944-1945). It was actually the advent of television that curtailed the popularity of these shows. TV series like *Tales of Tomorrow* (1951-1953), *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1965), *The Veil* (1958), *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), *One Step Beyond* (1959-1961), *Way Out* (1961), *The Outer Limits* (1963-1965), *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971), *Night Gallery* (1969-1973), fascinated the audience with their captivating images and filming techniques and they are still watched by many even today.

Apart from the radio and television, the Gothic was accommodated by the rising industry of the cinema as well, which, from its inception, drew on Gothic narratives in order to attract and thrill viewers. Since then, the Gothic, through the genres of thrillers, horror and fantasy movies remains one of the most lucrative and successful parts of the industry. All classic Gothic texts, like *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which holds the record of the most frequently filmed classic Gothic text, have been re-interpreted, re-filmed and re-directed countless times. In a similar fashion to their literary corollaries, cinematic Gothic addressed the anxieties of the time. Thus, in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), the extremities of the Great War of 1914-18 are dramatized through the story of a somnambulist created by a mad scientist to murder innocent women. In Fritz Lang’s iconic *Metropolis* (1926), the parvenu class generated by the accelerated capitalization of the time is criticized through the film’s class of underground mechanic laborers who are ruthlessly exploited by a futuristic decadent oligarchy. In the 1930s version of *Frankenstein*, the creature, played by Boris Karloff, is dressed in a workman’s clothes explicitly alluding to the unemployed that industrialism had generated and abandoned during the Great Depression. Likewise, the Hammer studios produced in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s a series of movies characterized by sensuality and violence that expressed anxieties concerning sexual libertinism and deviations from the gender norms of the time. Meanwhile, directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Roman Polanski and Michael Powell, through their work, addressed the horror implicit in everyday life not as a device for cheap sensation, but rather as a subtle means for psychological exploration. This was also the time when the genre started attracting the attention of “serious” writers again.
10. Postmodern Gothic

As we have already seen, the Gothic, since its inception, has been a hybrid form that brings together conflicting or opposite cultural forms in order to challenge and undermine assumptions concerning social norms, identity, sexuality or representation. By constantly realigning its devices and by pushing representation to its limits, a complex set of self-reflexive meta-narratives has developed within the Gothic tradition, which draw the reader’s attention on how meaning is constructed within the narrative and thus maintain an ironic distance and relation to the text itself. It is no wonder, then, that the Gothic, as many critics have noted, is in full accord with postmodernist art and culture. As a matter of fact, postmodernism, as the French post-structuralist philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard, has argued, marks a revived interest in the sublime as a contemporary reminder of the limitations of reason. In light of this peculiar kinship, the dissemination of the Gothic has been accelerated during postmodernism into an even wider array of narratives and cultural forms than it did in the twentieth century, becoming, thus, an integral part of the music industry, fashion, comics, graphic novels, or video games. Maybe this is the reason why, since the 1970s, the Gothic has attracted so much critical attention and reconsideration. Some such seminal studies on the Gothic are: *The Fantastic* (1978) by the French-Bulgarian critic Tzvetan Todorov which provides an intriguing definition of the “fantastic” as distinct from “fantasy”; David Punter’s *The Literature of Terror* (1983) which broadens the term of Gothic as a preoccupation with fear in order to include more works in it; Rosemary Jackson’s *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1983) which enriches Todorov’s study with psychological insight; Chris Baldick’s *In Frankenstein’s Shadow* (1991) which traces the origin of Shelley’s myth; and Fred Botting’s *Gothic* (1996) which provides a very comprehensive approach to the genre.
As far as fiction is concerned, the affiliation established between postmodernism and the Gothic is not only manifested in writers like Stephen King, James Herbert, John Saul, Dean Koontz, Shaun Hutson and Clive Barker, who have basically been occupied with Gothic, horror and terror stories, but can be detected in nearly all genres and modes of writing from magical realism to poetry and from Afro-American fiction to social satire and critique, as we shall see.

In her collection of short stories *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), Angela Carter, a feminist novelist and critic, revisited Charles Perrault’s seventeenth-century rewriting of a series of oral medieval tales. Through a complex set of narrative frames, which were formally in full compliance with both Gothic and postmodern traditions, Carter reviewed these well known tales, by fusing magic realism and the Gothic, in order to foreground gender, sexuality and identity issues in a manner that transcended polar distinctions and cultural or theoretical conventions. So, in “The Company of Wolves,” which was a rewriting of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the heroine does not feel threatened by the wolf but rather willingly sleeps with him. Carter here tells us the story of a typical innocent Gothic heroine who is ultimately saved from her malevolent husband not by a knight but rather by her mother, in order to discuss female sexuality and identity through a feminist perspective.

In a similar fashion, Anne Sexton, the American poet and feminist, in her poetic collection called *Transformations* (1971), revisits the fairy tales of the Grimm brothers. She initially intended the poems of the collection to be part of an opera for children, yet Sexton foregrounded in such a detailed manner all the implicit violence that lurks under the narrative of the fairy tales (incest, murder, haunting, cannibalism, rape, madness) that she eventually had to withdraw them. This violence is presented in an explicit Gothic idiom because Sexton wants to highlight the fact that these narratives, which typically address children, are full of stereotypes and scenes that are not as innocent as we take them to be. She manages to establish this ironic commentary on such traditional forms through the medium of the Gothic. As a form characterized by hybridity, the Gothic enables Sexton to bring together the past and the present, innocence and darkness, irony and horror and thus come up with a complex, postmodern narrative.

In *Beloved* (1987) Toni Morrison, a most influential Afro-American novelist, employed the device of the ghost with a postmodern twist. Sethe’s house is haunted by the ghost of “Beloved,” her daughter, whom she murdered because she wanted to spare her the life of a slave. When Sethe’s lover, Paul D, moves into her house the ghost disappears and at approximately the same time a girl appears in the neighborhood. As the girl, Sethe’s other daughter and Sethe herself become friends, we are led to believe she is “Beloved.” The girl soon moves into Sethe’s house forcing her lover to leave, thus mother and daughter are eventually reunited. What is interesting is that through the trope of the ghost and the doublings that it generates in the narrative, Morrison manages to bring together the private narrative of Sethe, and the history of slavery and female suppression. Personal or collective history is represented here as a haunting ghost that is everywhere and
nowhere, that is both intangible and palpable, the uncanny incarnate as the return of the repressed. In this sense, Carter, Sexton and Morrison all participate in the rewriting of history, each drawing from the Gothic in her own unique way.

Modern Gothic, however, is not only engaged with issues of historical representation; it also challenges social conventions and our conception of reality. This trend is evident in *The Collector* (1963), a novel by the influential British novelist John Fowles. Fowles’ novel is based on James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, but also draws explicitly from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. After winning the football lottery, Frederic Clegg kidnaps Miranda and keeps her in the basement of his newly acquired house hoping that she will eventually fall in love with him. Miranda fails to escape, falls ill and dies and Clegg decides to kidnap another girl. Fowles is based on the Gothic conventions of secluded houses, abducted young girls, framed narratives (Miranda’s journal in the middle of the book is framed by Fred’s first person narration), lost and found manuscripts, and employs a very dense intertextual web in order to question good and evil, or reality and fiction. The reader soon realizes that Clegg’s freakishness lies in his conventionality, in the fact that he is the epitome of middle class propriety, whereas Miranda’s highbrow, arrogant and ultimately failed attempt to educate Clegg raises serious doubts about the role of high culture in the reformation of the philistines. Although Fowles utilizes here an army of traditional Gothic devices, he minimizes their supernatural qualities. The frightening, as a result, does not reside in a distant castle, but is part of our everyday world and ourselves.

In *American Psycho* (1991), a very controversial work, Bret Easton Ellis, a postmodernist American novelist, presents his critique of capitalist culture in an explicitly Gothic idiom. Ellis’ novel is set in the acquisitive world of Wall Street. The horror implicit in corporate materialism and the way the modern banking system exploits people are addressed through the figure of the protagonist, Patrick Bateman, who is a very successful and fashionable banker, yet, a ruthless serial killer and rapist at the same time. Patrick is unable to feel any kind of remorse or shame for the pain that he inflicts on his victims, reflecting in his attitude the coldness, impersonality and indifference of corporate banking. As a matter of fact, Ellis’ narrative refrains from any psychological accounts or justifications of the hero’s behavior presenting us with a cold depthless surface where everything is meaningless. Patrick is a psycho not so much because of his murderous deeds but rather because of his detachment, impassiveness, distraction, and inability to focus and by extension feel. He is a fragmented and neurotic personality loosely kept together only through the social status that his position holds.

And this is precisely where the horror lies in Ellis’ novel. The book modernizes, or we might even say post-modernizes, the Gothic by turning the stock character of the merciless powerful aristocratic into a 90s “golden boy” who belongs to the modern elite caste of Wall Street bankers and is arrogantly above the law despite the fact that he is accountable for many crimes. The device of the Gothic castle is, in its turn, transmuted into the labyrinth of corporate capitalism, while the cultural corollaries, hollowness, commercialization, emotional and moral vacancy, are imprinted on a post-modern claustrophobic waste land. Ellis’ story is, in order words, a modern version of the narrative of *Frankenstein*; only now, the mad scientist is late capitalism, an economic and political system that has grown out of proportion and replaced nearly all existing value systems, and the creature is no longer made of disparate body parts, but rather of dissimilar identity pieces that loosely form a psychotic (w)hole.

**Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho**

*Here is a typical example of the association established in the novel between superficiality and evil.*

[There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity, something illusory, and though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh griping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: I simply am not there. It is hard for me to make sense on any given level. Myself is fabricated, an aberration. My personality is sketchy and unformed, my heartlessness goes deep and is persistent. My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago (probably at Harvard) if they ever did exist. There are no more barriers to cross. All I have in common with the
uncontrollable and the insane, the vicious and the evil, all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it, I have now surpassed. I still, though, hold on to one single bleak truth: no one is safe, nothing is redeemed. Yet I am blameless. Each model of human behavior must be assumed to have some validity. Is evil something you are? Or is it something you do? My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape. But even after admitting this—and I have countless times, in just about every act I’ve committed—and coming face-to-face with these truths, there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant nothing.

11. Conclusion: The End (?)

It is has become clear through this overview why the Gothic as a genre has both persisted for such a long period of time and vigorously fascinated people despite its countless mutations. Formally and technically, the Gothic involves artistic devices and mechanisms that directly appeal to the senses creating suspense, horror, laughter, sympathy, fright, angst, etc., and keeping the reader, viewer, spectator or listener excited and attentive. Furthermore, the Gothic also provides a sort of emotional depth that everyday humdrum life most usually lacks. How do Gothic narratives still manage to fascinate, however, since these devices are usually clichéd and easily recognizable, and Gothic plotlines are conventional and predictable? It seems that they function very much like dreams do. According to Freud, repressed wishes and desires achieve in dreams a sort of fantasized fulfillment by being distorted so that they will not disturb and wake us; they acquire, in other words, a manifest dream form that disguises their latent nightmarish content. Likewise, the Gothic is implicitly addressing, through its fictions, anxieties that are too extreme to be consciously considered or confronted. It employs a familiar, worn-out and distinguishable form of nightmare in an attempt to give outlet to, parody, sublimate, or impose order upon a nightmarish disorder that resides in the realm of the inexpressible. As such, the Gothic can also be seen as a mechanism of organizing the constantly shifting
The Gothic and Its Revivals

Re-Cap:

✓ The Gothic emerged in the eighteenth century as part of Romanticism and was a reaction against the Enlightenment.

✓ Since then, the Gothic has retained its popularity due to the fact that it is not only highly amusing but also a medium through which anxieties and fears are imaginatively addressed or resolved.

✓ Its most defining characteristic is its adaptability, mutability and inclusiveness.

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material of life. And, since it still retains its eighteenth-century double aim to instruct and entertain, it is still persistently popular. Therefore, in all likelihood, the Gothic will continue to excite and thrive not only due to its dual character and psychological utility but also due to the fact that it is a constantly shifting and adaptable cultural form, and, as such, can appropriate in a very uncanny way the vital force of life itself.
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**Romantic Gothic**


**Victorian Gothic**


**Modernist & Postmodernist Gothic**


**Female Gothic**


**Gothic Gender**


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- Project Bartleby
- The Cyclopedia of Ghost Story Writers.
- Horror Master Classics
- Annotated Bibliography from the University of Virginia
- Horrofind.com
- CryptCrawl.com
- City of Shadows: A Gothic Tour of Victorian London
- Victorian Popular Fiction, or The Feasts of Blood: Victorian Sensation fiction
- The Dark Side of the Net: Gothic e-texts