

Transmutation and Genealogy of Gothic Era: A Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

For a long-time it has traditionally been understood that the development of the term Gothic was a distasteful objective of denigrating medieval art, medieval architecture, medieval decorum meaning barbarous or uncouth. Perhaps one of the reasons, why the term has not always been linear or culturally diverse. However, today Gothic has been metamorphosed into several genres and sub-genres and meanings, and has tainted others by expanding and adapting to represent various perception where the most fascinating element of Gothic is its imaginative exploration of quasi facets of culture, of human consciousness, such as body and mind in their peculiar, raced, gendered universal applicability. Sheer thanks to the noteworthy efforts of philosophers, topographers, archaeologists, painters, writers for their unflinching and delightful works that they began to use Gothic motifs in them, thereby enabling the audience to gaze on the gothic traces with a fresh eye.

The purpose of this essay is therefore to discuss the genus of Gothic, the evolution of its cult and role in contemporary culture, its undergone continuous negotiations, transfigurations, and contestations, to reflect at the progress of Gothic ruins, stereotypes, and their influence on cultural norms, carrying with them a fondness with the complexities of human minds and a new understanding of history.

KEYWORDS: Goths, Gothic, Medieval Art, Literature, Haunting, Spectre, Gothic and Contemporary World.

Introduction

If you type the term Gothic or Goth into google, you are likely to get millions of hits from spine-chilling history to contemporary rock music subculture and people's modern lifestyles. So, what do these things have in common? Is there some single Gothic past that can be written? We ought to understand the origin of the terms and their respective nomenclatures that have been modified from time to time. Numerous styles of ancient times architectural and artistic creations were referred to as "Gothic" throughout the Renaissance. Like how the Romans had regarded themselves as superlative to the barbarians, this art was viewed as being substandard. The word "Gothic" changed in the 18th century to refer to a literary subgenre that included dread. It underwent another transformation in the latter half of the 20th century, this time into a fashion and cultural tradition defined by bold eye makeup and all-black attire. Almost two hundred generations old, the Gothic aesthetic acknowledges the sordid history while looking forward to the potential. Gothic is prospering more than ever in the arts and in contemporary consciousness, with themes ranging from vampires and beasts to anxieties and environmentalist illusions.

However, the etymology of the word 'Gothic' is richly nuanced and perversely inconsistent, as we proceed.

The term "Gothic" emanates from the French and the Latin term, which implies "not classical." A comparison to the primitive Germanic people's cultures, it evolved into a mediaeval style of art and architecture that surfaced in Northern Europe in the 1640s, and by the 19th century, it had evolved into a work of literature that used mediaeval configurations to surmise unknown and astonishment. It



can also apply to surreal literature, divine architecture, classic horror films and distinctive form of any contemporary style be it music, clothes, makeup and styling or your lifestyle. While on the other hand as we speak of the Goths, they were the dark elf intruders that vanquished the Roman empire, laid waste to learning and civilizations and brought about the dark ages or in other words, the term Gothic originated in the name for the eastern Germanic tribes specifically, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths wherein these two tribes began a war against the mighty Rome, which eventually took its toll on Rome and as a result, the Roman empire collapsed as a world power. Ultimately, they were often praise, as overcoming the hegemony by rebelling against the authoritative ancient Rome, and that is very much how the term Gothic gets emerged in later English historical thinking. Magna Carta for instance, is seen as an example of the Gothic essence that manifests itself in history which in particular signify those historical moments in history where these Goths have stood up against the Roman's persecution over them. Around the same period, Gothic is often synonymous with the cult of medieval forms, such as medieval architecture, medieval sculptures, medieval literature, and modern styles such as film, entertainment (music), fashion and the individual's demeanour.

The moral revolution of the Goths enabled the churches (Catholics) to rise and establish themselves in western Europe. By then, in the 1530s, a Florentine historiographer, Giorgio Vasari used the term 'barbarous German style' to refer Gothic architecture in pejorative form, in order to differentiate the medieval era from the classical period by blaming 'the Goths', of dismantling ancient structures after conquering Rome and fashioning new ones in their themes. However, till the time a positive critical connotation of Gothic architecture took place where writings of critics like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe dubbed Gothic the "deutsche Architektur" and the "embodiment of German genius," while some French writers like Camille Enlart gave it a national embodiment for France, calling it "architecture française" or architecture of France. Since then, these Goths were the first to develop a peculiar architectural form, marking the end of the classical pagan world. Architecture is the art of assembling and embellishing edifices made by man so that the mere sight of them could enhance people's mental health, efficiency, and pleasure. Gothic as an architectural style originated in ecclesiastical architecture, primarily as churches. Generations of builders from the 12th to 16th centuries were obsessed with verticality; they wanted to build architectures (cathedrals) that were filled with height and light for a heavenly sort of environment where some of the significant features that made it possible were Pointed arches, flying buttresses and large windows accentuating light-filled, airy inner workings instead of the robust masonry and columns of traditional structures. John Ruskin, a proponent of the Gothic revival, wrote:

"Gothic is not only the best, but the only rational architecture, as being that which can fit itself most easily to all services, vulgar or noble."

Therefore, although the style was associated with a darker side, it hardly had any dark or gruesome undertones. It was rather inclined more towards spiritual meaning as in space, light, artistry, and craft. By the mid-1600s, Gothic was reinvented for a more modern audience. Fast forward to the 18th century, when its meaning migrated to a new form of genre known as Gothic fiction or Gothic literature. Its root ushered in 18th-century radical young creatives, the Romantics, who harked back to the romances of the Gothic time or the Middle Ages, thereby opposing principles of scientific reasons of Enlightenment literature. Writers like John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Casper David Friedrich shared an interest in the sublime, the eternal, resistance, consciousness, and the past. While authors like Goethe and Lord Byron pursued an idealised vision of a past rich in natural landscapes and mystical supernatural powers. However, this time, the phrase was applied to refer to a more ominous kind of Romanticism yet again. Horace Walpole coined the phrase for the first time in his 1764 book, *The Castle of Otranto*, which continues to grip the public through his ghostly tale and mysterious prophecies to the present day in hundreds of books, television programmes and films. A query that might arise in our minds is why Gothic is associated with the 'undead' or the 'morbid'? Do you think Gothicism delves into social taboos and trauma? For this, we will have to delve deeper into the era. The Gothic is grounded in blending the old with the new, folding in on themselves and within this context, it terrifies the reader by displaying the horrors that plague our world. A retrospective remark by David Punter reads as:



“Gothic in the last years of the eighteenth century was, as we have seen, partly an attitude towards history; more specifically, it clearly had to do with the ways in which a social class sought to understand and interpret class relations in the past.”

Several years after its publication, Romanticism gained traction, and gothic novels soon took off, where Gothic writers like Ann Radcliffe emerged from this boost of Romanticism. They published the majority of her works, including the influential *“The Mysteries of Udolpho”*, which took a more serious turn in 1818 and 19th century when writers like Mary Shelley’s *“Frankenstein”*, man’s smugness being warned about Edgar Allan Poe’s *“The Fall of the House of Usher”* focusing on psychological torment and Jane Austen’s Gothic spoof *“Northanger Abbey”* criticising cultural contempt for novels, Oscar Wilde’s, *“The Picture of Dorian Gray”*, a precursor of magical realism to Bram Stoker’s *“Dracula”* women’s enslavement, elevated Gothicism to new level of dangerous public persona and erotic appeal of life and death to rampant hypocrisy of society. The notion of the existence of haunting, supernatural forces and apparitions is arguably a bit of a given. The concern with societal deviance throughout history finds a vent in the Gothic aesthetic and its deviation from reality. So, it is conceivable to see the form of the Gothic monster as both a projection and a tangible embodiment of everyday life’s many opinions, convictions, and concerns. The monster in gothic tales is created as a very porous, movable, and comprehensible figure using different approaches. For instance, Frankenstein and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde simultaneously create monsters and reflect concepts of suppression, psychodynamics, and personal consciousness, developing theoretical ideas such as Survival of the fittest and human biology, boundary-crossing, and eventually, the anxiety and damage wrought by the external Unknown. Both novels undergo a basic crossover from human into monstrosity, but it constantly evolves in varied contexts, much like the Gothic genre. Both novels employ the monster concept to demonstrate strife and insecurities of existence via psychologising Gothic elements. By its immensely provocative structure and representation of scientism, Gothic literature can reflect society’s shifting standards and fears. It also retains typical Gothicized themes of dread, horrors, and panic while giving audiences a sanity saver.

Nevertheless, it is reliable to assert that there has been a constant fascination with ghosts in particular, at least as long as there have been stories to tell. Regardless of the context referring to the continuity of the ethereal as an apparent innate constituent of religious or historical perception, or if someone is referring to tabloid-style mass communication and the tele-perpetuation mediums of discourses of the inexplicable and many more, it would not be incorrect to assert that stories of fear and panic and unnerving representations which endure plausible reason and epistemological identification run rampant throughout many belief systems. The statement carries a certain amount of uncertainty. Still, it is remarkable that it is unquestionably acceptable in significant aspects and, nowadays more than ever, that spirits are unceasingly between us.

What is it supposed to indicate to engage in penning or perusing as though there are spirits around or to imply that these activities are tormented? What reading strategies are possible to employ to recognise the many spectre phenomena that appear in 19th-century artists’ masterpieces? Or what happens when the cultural patterns of the literary period and our contemporary interpretation of it simultaneously undergo substantial transformation due to the process of spectrality, things in life, and the supernatural? Within this context, Julian Wolfreys, an author, examines these eerie distortions in writing and how such tenacity tackles questions of realism and accountability that depict the process of comprehension, commencing with an analysis of topics of ghosts, the spooky, the gothic, and ethereal.

For Julian Wolfreys the Gothic or haunted stories are: *“Undeniable aspect of the identity of modernity.”* This speaks of the striking aspect of Gothic genre that despite having dark forces it is good at capturing the reality of just normal run-of-the-mill nature. As a result of this many of these novel’s elements became genre staples inspiring modern classics and countless movies they spawned and which continue to flourish up to this day. The macabre persists as a dominant force of dispersion, also as traumatising of the current moment, as the residual of non-identity inside of individuality, and



via indications of separateness, alienation, dehumanisation or revenant, regardless whether a person utilises the word to allude to a writing in the trivial manner of a written document, a movie or a multimedia, or even if one expresses quite comprehensively of a virtualized environment of Spectro conceptual connections when discussing of entire text. As Jacques Derrida asserts that spectre is not only a relic of the history or a phenomenon of the past. Rather, the eerie sensation was never more profound: “...the experience of ghosts is not tied to a bygone historical period, but on the contrary, is accentuated, accelerated by modern technologies like film, television, the telephone. These technologies inhabit, as it were, a phantom structure.”

Indeed, a single subject or artistic endeavour, like gothic novels, cannot encompass or adequately describe haunting. They go beyond any individual story style, subject, or linguistic expression. This imparts them an ethereal appearance and signals the potential for scaring. So, you have Gothic music, Gothic film, Gothic fashion, and, of course, the subculture for the contemporary Gothic genre. British post-punk bands like Joy Division, Bauhaus, and the Cure fused grim songs with imagery influenced by Gothic elements of novels, drawing inspiration from revolutionary music bands like The Velvet Underground and The Doors. This, in turn, influenced the androgynous glam fashion of personal adornment, which featured heavily made-up Kohl-rimmed eyes, white skin, black hair, and black clothing, which are still used as an inspiration by numerous haute couture and high fashionistas today. Not only that, but in the 20th century, Gothic themes were used in films and franchises, whether in horror blockbusters like “*The Exorcist*”, or vampirism in “*Twilight*” and even in food labels adopting Frankenstein-themed cereals and Dracula-inspired candies to the black truffle cake we eat made with dark activated charcoal, black sesame, and black squid ink. In fact, the filmmaking representations of J. K. Rowling’s “*Harry Potter*” books progressively accomplish a transient switching of the Gothic, functioning as an intellectual environment that ingests and permeates multiple literary genres. Harry’s narrative frequently depicts haunting scenes—he has terrible psychic connections with the Dark Lord and nightmares about him—the destruction brought about by Voldemort’s allies, the Death Eaters, and the deaths of other individuals like the killings of Lily and James Potter and Lord Voldemort’s assault on Harry’s life. Therefore, such contemporary filmmaking is characterised by many Gothic features and interests infused with wickedness, despair, chaos, and killing.

Yet we must additionally be aware that any contemporary interaction technology that requires us to narrate our personalities in connection to others who are not there in person is indisputably ghostly. Unlike the phenomena of the development of gothic literature at the conclusion of the eighteenth century, it does not hold true that spirits only adhere to the history and stories conveyed in the past. Conversely, the prevalence of entities and macabre results are indisputable characteristics of modernism. The truth is that we can never fully conclude the tale of modernisation because of the multiple spatial markings, which indicate supernatural disruption. Haunting emerges in a definite connection to the authenticity of modernisation, which together notifies the notions we assemble about modernity and, as a result, what is generated well within the void and moment of the contemporary. No matter whether we are looking for the commencement of the story or the conclusion, we cannot confidently recount to ourselves a determinism of modernity. Gothic has a haunting quality that gives the familiarity something strange about it. Hence, its function is a systemic disruption. In essence, it pervades and, by eliciting an unsettling reaction, does not appear to be coming from somewhere else but rather is establishing itself known, just like Mark Wigley proposes, “...in a return of the repressed as a foreign element that strangely seems to belong to the very domain that renders it foreign.” As a result, we may discover that unsettling, ghosting, and spectrality are all key components in the Gothic genre’s building system in their entirety, whether they be found in architecture, art, literature, or multi-media technologies.

Although some experts believe that Gothic discourse came to an end in the nineteenth century, others believe that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was when Gothic literature really began to take off. In their opinion, the Gothic genre was completely settled as it was, but it has since progressed and changed to represent many contemporary concerns. Contemporary Gothic as a whole, makes a compelling situation that this aesthetic inevitably strikes a stability between a multitude of inconsistencies, such as the horrifying and inanimate, genuine self and goofiness, universal





attractiveness and cult obeying, contentment, and uproar, and that this alignment makes the Gothic an important representation of existing changing attitudes. Twentieth - century Gothic is a fascinating and essentially unique examination of the future Gothic mindset that permeates mainstream society these days, whether one is looking to comprehend the narratives underlying the television show *Haunted* or to derive symbolic significance from modern writing, as Catherine Spooner opines, “*the Gothic can be progressive or conservative, nostalgic or modern, comic or tragic, political or apolitical, feminine or masculine, erudite or trashy, transcendently spiritual or doggedly material, sinister or silly. It is difficult to say what contemporary Gothic “is,” or even what it is like, since it does all of these things so well...It is a perfect product, readily available and simply adapted to the needs and purposes of a wide variety of consumers.*” The statement continues to be one of the most thorough and current statements on the complex and ambiguous realm of the gothic in literature, cinema, and society.

The Gothic genre investigates its inherent considerations and involvement with current problems. This article outlines the discursive and expressive tactics of involvement and exposition, impact and appeal of Gothic and concentrates on the tangible and essential efforts undertaken by the genre. Further, this research explores the analogy of Gothic in a way that can measure and examine our anxieties through literature, art, music, fashion, and other mediums. Gothic has changed significantly over the years and spawned many other types. It is and it will continue to enthrall the imaginations of people for many centuries yet to come for Goth now is a lifestyle option that reaches back into history to reshape today's society.

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