

Distinctiveness of Victorian Gothic Literature

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Literature is never static, but rather as time goes on, it morphs and changes. These changes frequently reflect history, and changes in culture. For a genre to survive these changes, it must be flexible and able to adapt to its writers and readers. Gothic literature is a genre to not only face these changes, but also to survive them. During the Victorian era, the genre morphs, reflecting a changing world in the face of things such as urbanization and the decline of the landed gentry, but through these changes, one can see these novels' origins in classic Gothic literature by fundamental characteristics shared with the original genre. This paper will discuss some common characteristics of the original Gothic literature and demonstrate their application and adjustment in the Gothic literature of the Victorian era.

### 1. Classic Gothic Literature

The roots of Gothic literature actually lay outside of the realm of literature entirely. Dr. Carol Margaret Davison, a specialist in Gothic and Victorian literature, notes that the term "Gothic" originally described a type of architecture, marked by "barbarism, obscurity and excess," (25). It was this term that came to describe more than just architecture and began to describe a genre of literature. That term "Gothic" had "wide cultural currency in Britain in the eighteenth century," conjuring "up images of medievalism – of gloomy, labyrinthine castles replete with secret inquisitorial chambers and long buried family secrets" and connotating "the spectres of Britain's primitive, superstitious, corrupt and tyrannical Catholic past" (25). The term "Gothic" overlaps the realms of architecture and literature, and these connotations hold in both of these realms. The literature genre bearing this name resembles the cathedrals that preceded it in the use of the term "Gothic" by its "supreme levelling effect" that reminds readers of their own humanity (225). The use of the term in both architecture and literature makes the Gothic a unique genre. Davison explains that starting with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*,

widely regarded as the first Gothic novel, the Gothic bears the influence of many different literary works and styles, such as Elizabethan drama and the sentimental novel (24, 58). Despite being a mix of different popular genres, Gothic became a distinct and important genre, drawing critical study. Indeed, it was quite a popular genre during the 18<sup>th</sup> century following its inception, with some claiming that in one decade during this period, at least a third of all the novels published in Great Britain were Gothic (2). Davison explains that while considered vulgar by some, the genre appealed to the middle class during a time when reading novels became more popular and not just an activity enjoyed by wealthy men (2). The public in Great Britain was fascinated by the Gothic novel from its creation, and the genre took the literature world by storm.

The reasons for this fascination can be understood by the study of some of the common characteristics that bring together Gothic novels. One of the principle concerns of Gothic literature is the sublime, which according to John Bowen, a Professor of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature at the University of York, is explored to “shock [the reader] out of the limits of [their] everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanations.” The sublime in Gothic literature captures the readers curiosity and opens their minds to explore concepts and ideas they would not usually believe possible. Davison states that the invocation of the sublime is often linked to the subliminal through the concept of a threshold, and transgression over this threshold, allowing for metaphorical study of and challenges to boundaries such as personal and national identity (30-31). Upon this basic feature of the subliminal rests the ability of the Gothic to explore contemporary culture and social norms.

Another significant characteristic of Gothic literature is its exploration of the human psyche, which contributes to the Gothic’s status as a timeless genre. According to Davison, the Gothic villain is distinguished from the contemporary uni-dimensional villain of the melodrama

by a human complexity that enables the reader to easily identify with him (70). Rather than being wholly evil, there are multiple sides to the Gothic villain's story, making the reader sympathetic to his case. This sympathy allows the novel to study the soul, by means of the hero being "recalled to his own soul....a staple in the Gothic novel" (68). As the complexity of right and wrong is explored in the Gothic novel, the protagonist not only seeks justice, but studies himself. For the hero to look inwards, the Gothic displays "compelling and telling confrontations and transactions between the Self and the Other" in which the "Other usually functions as an externalization and mirror of the Self's otherwise repressed, socially unacceptable and unsanctioned propensities" (32). By this dichotomy of the soul, neither the hero nor the villain is wholly "good" or "bad." Using these complex heroes and villains, the Gothic "prob[es] a broad spectrum of contemporary concerns," and by doing so, "provid[es] a cultural medium for an imaginative expression and resolution of social anxieties" (33, 75). This function as a way of confronting social concerns allows the Gothic to stay relevant whenever it is written, but also results in Gothic novels having an inescapable link to the time period they were written in.

While the Gothic explores the human psyche, broadly reflecting the social anxieties of the time, common motifs in this exploration are "the fall", "dread", and "desire." The Gothic resembles the Romantic in its "psychic explorations and conceptualizations of self-consciousness as a type of onerous 'Fall' out of innocence into knowledge and self-division" along with a multitude of variations on the fall in Eden (Davison 31, 51). This theme of the fall in Gothic literature studies our basic humanity. The Gothic once again uses its "fallen, flawed protagonists" who are "plagued by the burden of self-consciousness and secular concerns" and who can only be healed "in rare moments of sublimity" (31). Through the study of the fall, Gothic tackles social issues that are prevalent to contemporary readers, such as the construction

of the self, and the nature of self-identity (31). The Gothic also takes on the taboo subjects of unspoken dreads and desires of its readers (32). This dread is expressed partly by terror, and may be “physical psychological, or metaphysical” and “of body, mind, or spirit” (32). The Gothic is well-known for its’ terror, belonging to a much broader motif of dread, that can be manifested in many ways. Through this terror and dread, the Gothic “Takes on board much of its cultural pathology, maintaining a series of deep-seated, troubled connections with wider systems of prejudice, paranoia and bigotry” (32). In its tackling of unspoken dreads of the readership, larger cultural issues are addressed. Desire, on the other hand, is noted by Davison in the Gothic’s frequent nostalgic portrayal of the past as idyllic (52). By expressing these unspoken dreads and desires, the Gothic is compelling to contemporary readers, excited by the taboo and drawn in by a connection they cannot outwardly express. These studies of the human psyche and their interplay provides exacting ways to examine the issues of a time, making the Gothic a window into the minds of contemporary readers, expressing their greatest wants and fears.

A very important feature of the Gothic is the use of setting. Going back to Gothic’s origins, *The Castle of Otranto* “employ[s] architectural space to evoke sublime feelings,” and as a result of Walpole’s “strategic artistic cross-fertilization” of architecture and literature, architectural space has become “integral to Gothic literature’s treatment and exploration of human psychology” (Davison 30). Architecture is not just significant in Gothic literature in the sharing of the term “Gothic,” it also is an important element within Gothic works. In general with this motif, “characters in Gothic fiction...find themselves in a strange place; somewhere other, different, mysterious” which “is often threatening or violent” (Bowen). There is an otherness in the setting itself in the genre. In accordance with Gothic architecture, this mysterious setting is commonly a castle, considered by some scholars to be the perfect

“backdrop for [the] psychomachia” of the “ambivalent yet sublimely powerful Gothic hero-villain,” (Davison 70). The castle, a staple of Gothic architecture with connotations of emotions that are evoked throughout Gothic literature, provides the quintessential setting for much of classic Gothic literature. To increase the mystery of the setting, frequently in classic Gothic fiction, this castle is in southern Europe, distant to the readers of Great Britain (Bowen). By placing this already mysterious setting far from the homes of the readership, the intrigue increased, and authors are able to suspend belief more easily. Davison explains that the Gothic castle is full of symbolism, as it has survived both conflict and the wear of time and has seen the lineage of a powerful family, and it’s seen as carrying on the life of its founder (70, 72). Additionally, the castle served as “an emblem of secular power and authority....associated with inheritance in its various manifestations – material/economic, familial and spiritual/religious” (71). The castle has many associations, both political and personal, that allow Gothic literature to probe a variety of issues. According to Davison, Gothic novels feed off of the castle’s atmosphere and symbolism (70). It is the emotional connotations of the castle that give it this energy. This ability to energize underlines the nature of this motif, as the architecture itself “becomes psychically alive, hyper-organic,” with the “character and will of its former owners” such that “Place becomes personality, as every corner of the dark recess of the Gothic castle exudes a remorseless aliveness and often a vile intelligence” (32). It is once again the history of the castle that gives it an almost supernatural depth. Davison states that this personified castle is an ideal setting to probe the human psyche, as the “Psychological ‘mind’ is mapped on to [the] physical place” itself (70-71, 32). This mapping of emotion onto the physical makes the setting an enabler for the study of the human psyche. An inanimate medium through which to study the

human condition, the setting, and in particular the castle, exists as an important element of the Gothic.

Another motif in Gothic literature is the uncanny, which was defined by Sigmund Freud as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (quoted in Bowen). According to Bowen, what should have been over comes back to haunt the present, which often manifests a fear of modern technology almost as strong as the fear of ghosts in Gothic literature. The ghost plays a role in the uncanny as well as it “is something from the past that is out of its proper time or place and which brings with it a demand, a curse or plea” (Bowen). Just like time itself in Gothic novels, Bowen explains that ghosts confuse the sense of continuity of time, blending past and present. This fear of modern technology and the past coming to haunt the present reflects the Gothic’s role in expressing the fears of its contemporary readers.

As religion waned during the period of the inception of Gothic literature, the supernatural became a key element of Gothic fiction, and fears give way to nightmarescapes and the motif of death. The uncertainty and doubt include a “doubt about the supernatural and spiritual” (Bowen). The ghost therefore becomes ingrained in the Gothic (Davison 66). There exists a fear of both supernatural powers, and social forces that are “so vast and impersonal, that they seem to have supernatural strength” (66-67). Many Gothic works are “oneiric in nature, symbolically invested, conspiracy-suffused dreamscapes/nightmarescapes that seem to exist at the penumbral crossroads of consciousness and unconsciousness” which can be explained in part by many of these works being “born of vivid, haunting dreams/nightmares” of the authors themselves (33). In this strand of Gothic texts, there is a “dream logic...[that] is particularly capable of evoking the visual characteristics of shock’ and centre on an often paranoid subject” (33). These nightmarescapes

facilitate a study of the human psyche, by placing their paranoid subject in a situation full of horror. Death plays a similar role in the Gothic. While “the Gothic aimed to spiritualize death and divest it of any morbid and terrifying associations, it often did so by amplifying morbidity and terror in its death-related episodes,” and as such “the Gothic could figuratively parade its corpse and bury it, too” (37). At the same time, though, “death is also frequently represented in association with sublime terror and responded to by the way of the contradictory emotions of desire and fear” (63). This, as before, allows the Gothic to examine the human psyche, and the interrelationship of desire and fear. These more morbid and terrifying elements of Gothic literature at times oppose orthodox religion but nonetheless remain important.

Despite these nightmarescapes and the supernatural, Gothic literature remains grounded in reality, at times increasing the element of horror. Rather than being “ahistorical, sheerly escapist fictions,” Gothic texts are actually “rich cultural productions firmly tethered to various complex material realities” (Davison 37). As previously mentioned, these works induced terror by the realities of the time it was written in (37). Both “the repressed dreams and nightmares of modernity” made up these nightmarescapes (46). In the face of this “fragmented and fallen modern subject,” the “compensatory conception of wholeness” frequently “involves a Providentially directed conception of history,” on the more religious side of the Gothic (52). Even the image of the paradisaic days gone by are not merely “rehears[ing] the past,” instead, “they figure that past as a lost Golden Age that can be recovered” (51). The past can also be represented as “a barbaric era out of which we have safely, thankfully emerged” thereby “evok[ing] a fear of historical reversion; that is, of the nagging possibility that the despotisms of the past may prove to be undead,” in other words, the uncanny (52). In its articulation of this threat, “the Gothic advances the idea that the present may be hijacked by the past and forced to



repeat it,” which blurs the “boundary between past and present” as “a true ‘future’ is effectively withheld” (52). As such, the Gothic acts “as a cautionary tale that registers the fallout of progress should the lessons of the past, both personal and political, not be heeded” (53). This basis in reality, regardless of the supernatural, makes the horrors of the Gothic all the more real and terrifying.

The Gothic is a genre that can be difficult to pin down, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from the genre’s conception, there are a number of elements that are common among most Gothic works. These elements include the use of an almost personified setting, an exploration of the human psyche, the invocation of the sublime and subliminal and the use of the supernatural and the uncanny. While these elements are certainly diverse, many of them contribute to Gothic’s role as a medium through which the social anxieties of its contemporary readers can be expressed. This role is significant, as it contributes to the Gothic’s continued use in the Victorian era, as well as its shift in character through the era.

## 2. The Rise of Victorian Gothic Literature

Through its exploration of social questions and problems, the Gothic genre has remained prevalent since its inception. According to Julian Wolfreys, a professor of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century British literature and culture, “the function of the Gothic” is “to evade the limits of form, so that ‘The gothic becomes truly haunting in that it can never be pinned down as a single identity, while it returns through various apparitions and manifestations, seemingly everywhere’” (Smith and Hughes 1-2). While there are a number of recognized commonalities between classic Gothic literature and Victorian Gothic literature, “the component parts of this untidy and undying monster have been variously, regularly and successfully reconfigured to promote vastly different political and aesthetic ends and to speak to a broad cross-section of audiences and eras” (Davison

57). Through repurposing components of the Gothic formula, it remains prevalent to the contemporary readers, and while changed, serves the same purpose of expressing social anxieties. As a result of ability to morph the different components, the line between what is and is not truly “Gothic” becomes somewhat unclear (Bowen). The Gothic genre remains alive throughout changes in society by morphing itself to meet the needs of its readers.

During the Victorian Era, which lasted the period of Queen Victoria’s reign, from 1837 to 1901, the Gothic persisted as a prevalent and popular genre, though it is not always acknowledged by scholars. While some scholars claim that “the Gothic only enjoyed a forty-year period of popularity between 1775 and 1815,” in reality, it maintained popularity and significance through the entirety of the Victorian era (Davison 220, 219). The reason that Gothic’s popularity in the Victorian era fails to be recognized by some, is that aforementioned flexibility, as much of what is being categorized as Gothic here “eludes its origins as it migrates into models of the self” as it “permeates Victorian culture in a complex what which evades any attempt to categorise it through the application of formal aesthetic criteria” (Smith and Hughes, 2). This true popularity can be seen, though, when it is considered that the Victorian period was “something of a heyday for the ghost story” (Smith and Hughes 3), and when acknowledging the Gothic short story tradition that spans the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Davison 220). This strain of Victorian Gothic literature is not always formally recognized by scholars, but it remained an important genre in the era.

The Victorian Gothic did have recognizable changes from classic Gothic literature, alterations that made it distinct from its origins. In these changes, however, continuities could also be seen, such that this strain of Gothic could still be seen to truly be Gothic literature. There existed “A dark Gothic vein, adapted to various ideological and thematic ends” that was seen in

publications such as “penny dreadfuls...shilling shockers, ghost stories and melodrama,” as well as “works of social realism, imperial romances, sensation novels and science fiction” (Davison 220). In this way, the Gothic was at times difficult to discern, as it found itself in unexpected works, beyond the “usual suspects” of “supernatural fiction, detective fiction, thrillers and science fiction” (220). Rather than pure Gothic works, the Victorian Gothic often used traditional Gothic conventions in works associated with other forms of literature, making unique developments in all involved genres through the Victorian era and beyond (220). An example of this is sensation fiction, which “from the 1850s onwards reworked a number of issues which were to be found in the earlier Gothic tradition” (Smith and Hughes 2). Through this application of Gothic, though, it “continued to function as a barometer of sociocultural anxieties” by exploring contemporary issues and fears just as the classic Gothic did (Davison 220). Many of the same devices, such as the “earlier female Gothic tropes” were drawn upon by authors in this era, so that some of the same characteristics could be seen through these new Gothic novels (Smith and Hughes 2). The changes in the genre over this period made Victorian Gothic literature distinct from the original conceptualization of the genre, but it remained connected by key elements.

While not always acknowledged, the Gothic remained important during the Victorian era. Its prominence is partially the cause of this lack of recognition, as the Gothic came to be found in a multitude of other genres, and also manifested in many subgenres, such that frequently the Gothic could not be classified as a coherent genre. Despite these changes, a distinct Gothic tradition and commonalities with classic Gothic literature can be identified in each of these related genres and subgenres of the Gothic.

### 3. Victorian Applications of the Gothic

One of the prevalent genres that applied Gothic elements in the Victorian era was realism. Realism, according to Davison, was a prevalent genre during the first half of the nineteenth century, and borrows classic Gothic conventions, recreating them in a more realistic setting (221). One pioneer of the incorporation of the Gothic into realist fiction was Charles Dickens, particularly evident in *Bleak House* (1853) and *Great Expectations* (1860-1), which “attest to his significant contributions – technical, thematic, and otherwise – to this radically new mode of creating atmosphere and rendering character” (221). It was not uncommon for realist works to draw on other genres, as “realist writers were always conscious of ‘the difference between truth and the appearance of truth’ and understood that this necessitated ‘several layers of meditation’ that drew on other genres for its expression” (Smith and Hughes 18). While this may make realism seem like “a jumble of inherited characteristics,” some scholars see this more as “the ultimate expression of sophistication and complexity where all other genres are manipulated and transformed into the single generic category of the real” (18). Realism’s ability to use and transform other genres makes it an ideal genre in which the Gothic, ever malleable, can be applied.

There are some disagreements as to whether it was Gothic that absorbed the realist genre, or whether it was the other way around. Some, such as Robert B. Heilman, sees this new realism as overwhelmingly Gothic, as he “coined the term ‘New Gothic’ to describe [the] innovative use of Gothic conventions...to flesh out character psychology in the burgeoning social realist novel” (Davison 221). On the other hand, some conclude that it was in fact “the Gothic” that was dispersed “into an ostensibly realist mode” and which “becomes assimilated when ‘the Gothic and the realist cross-fertilise each other’” (Smith and Hughes 4). This alternate view leaves the

Gothic and the realist, borrowing elements from each other but still individual entities. In this view, it is seen that “The Gothic did not only intervene to highlight realism’s limits but also to support the very project of Victorian realist fiction” (7). Regardless of the view of which genre absorbed the other, there is no argument that each in turn affected the other, creating something wholly new, not purely Gothic nor purely realist.

While the application of some Gothic elements in the realist genre, the supernatural in particular, may seem like an odd pairing, these elements served a function in realism that could not be achieved otherwise. The Gothic, interestingly, actually “render[ed] social realism more realistic” by its ability to “min[e] the depths of individual psychology” through which it “gave realistic expression to otherwise repressed aspects of the self” (Davison 221). Realist writers used the Gothic to deliver some important elements of realism including “secrecy, alienation, and monstrosity,” which provided an “opportunity to illuminate invisible relations between characters, and between things, that realism could not do without breaking the generic boundaries of the real” (Smith and Hughes 7). In realism, “suspense and the keeping of secrets...is used...to invite speculation and curiosity,” and “otherness” is used “to avoid the problem of finding there was ‘a spectrum of experience [that was] impossible to describe’” as it “was able to ‘render the ambiguity of perception’ ...that the more fixed real world could not,” and “the monstrous...creat[es] powerful anxieties for character and reader alike” (18). These devices, resembling some devices of the Gothic, served to make realism feel more realistic to the reader. The Gothic, in this, was often infused into the work by “the introduction of Gothic objects or by setting scenes within explicitly Gothic spaces,” calling on the element of the Gothic setting that so characterized Gothic works (7). In this way, the Gothic became “an interrogator of realism’s own limitations,” as only through the invocation of the unreal was realism able to

appear more real (7). This invocation of the Gothic “is central to the creation of meaning, and indeed to supporting its complex epistemology that figures the real as the multiple convergences of natural and unnatural, ordinary and extraordinary” (18). Thus, the Gothic is not an escape from realism, rather, it is “one of its central components, able to say something important about the world outside the restrictions that language places on the real” (24). Through this ability, the Gothic in realist works is able to illustrate what the readers can already relate with, but also hint at what the readers are unfamiliar with, something that pure realist writing cannot do (26). The realist and the Gothic support each other in turn, playing off of each genre’s strengths in the Victorian era to create powerful works that reflect reality and can provide deep social meaning.

While less prevalent, other genres at the time also made use of the Gothic mode. One of the genres to do this was science fiction, such as H. G. Well’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898), “which features vampiric Martians who invade England and systematically drain their victims’ blood by way of little pipettes” (Davison 223). Near the end of the century in particular, the Gothic becomes a part of the “burgeoning domain of science fiction” (223). Likewise, sensation novels also “reworked the Gothic, resurrecting the past through plays between surfaces...and depths” (Smith and Hughes 30). In these sensation novels, “Gothic images of verticality” are repurposed in order to “convincingly trope modern fears directly linked to research into the history of the earth and the place of man in that history” (34). In this can be seen the social anxieties of the time, keeping with the Gothic tradition. Though less prevalent during the Victorian era than realist novels, these other genres also kept the Gothic tradition alive through their use of Gothic conventions to enhance their respective genres.

Numerous subgenres of the Gothic also rose during this period. One of these subgenres is the Imperial Gothic, which uses “Gothic conventions in adventure romances that take their

protagonists to unfamiliar, faraway places” as well as “romances in which characters, creatures or uncanny objects from those [faraway] places appear in Britain, disturbing domestic peace and harmony” (Smith and Hughes 12). These Imperial Gothic works exhibit “anxieties about racial and social degeneration, the threat of going native, and the invasion of Britain by demonic colonial forces” (Davison 222). This keeps with the Gothic tradition of expressing social anxieties and demonstrates a specific common subset of these anxieties. Imperial Gothic has roots in social realist narratives, in which “economic anxieties regarding a principal source of British wealth are incorporated into dramatic ‘return of the repressed’ episodes” (223). This subgenre, related to the cross-over genre of the Gothic and the realist, demonstrates a fixation on a certain set of fears that were prevalent in the Victorian era, fitting with the role of the Gothic as a means to express these fears. Another prevalent subgenre of the Gothic in the Victorian era was the Female Gothic. This Female Gothic is “well represented” throughout the Victorian era, and “is generally distinguished from the traditional Gothic mode, as it centres its lens on a young woman’s rite of passage into womanhood and her ambivalent relationship to contemporary domestic ideology, especially the joint institutions of marriage and motherhood” (223). The Gothic conventions are deployed in the Female Gothic “for psychological and political ends to advance a gender-aware commentary on women’s roles and the dreaded husbands, guardians and institutions that threaten to control them” (223-224). In this way, the Female Gothic also keeps with Gothic traditions in discussing power and contemporary concerns and anxieties. The popular subgenres of the Gothic during the Victorian era demonstrate specific sets of anxieties that were prevalent during the period.

The Gothic genre gave way to a distinctive style that was borrowed by many other traditions that were not purely Gothic. This borrowing created many different hybrid genres,

giving the Gothic a new diversity. Contributing also to this diversity was the rise of distinctive Gothic subgenres, which in addition to their classic Gothic characteristics, had additional distinctive elements that made them coherent subsets of the Gothic tradition. In these hybrid genres and subgenres, the Gothic formula can still be identified.

#### 4. Victorian Transformations of Classic Characteristics

As a result of the cross-fertilization of genres during the Victorian era, some of the characteristics of classic Gothic literature are transformed. Among these characteristics is the Gothic's study of the human and national psyche. During the Victorian era, this study sees a "greater domestication and internalization" in order to "explore the dark recesses" of the psyche. (Davison 220). Often in Victorian Gothic literature, the psyche is explored through some "'double' or 'shadow self'" in order to reveal the "repressed aspects of the psyche" (221). This repression is often shown to be "socially sanctioned by an increasingly separate spheres ideology that promoted a strict gender-division between public/professional/masculine and private/domestic/feminine selves" and as such, this new string of Gothic literature "explore[s] the dynamic between repressive societies and repressed selves, and the precarious boundary between civilization and barbarism" (221). While this focus is not quite what the focus of classic Gothic literature is, it still reflects a study of dread and desire. This shift in focus of the study of the human psyche in Gothic literature reflects a shift in social concern, but at the heart of the concern is still unspoken desires and dreads.

Setting remains an important element of the Gothic but gone are the days of the Gothic castle. Two different settings replace it, one domestic like the original castle, the other urban (Smith and Hughes 3). This domestic setting is usually a manor house, which is more isolated than its classic Gothic counterpart due to the smaller size, and it "furnishes a fertile contact zone



between home and empire, one that is characterized by historical and cultural, conscious and unconscious, collisions and collusions” (Davison 223). This manor house is similar to the castle in its isolation and its ability to facilitate discussion of issues pertinent to the reader’s life. The manor house even “represents a particular manifestation of the uncanny” as it becomes “the site of troubled sexual secrets, so that far from guaranteeing safety, the domestic becomes the space through which trauma is generated” (Smith and Hughes 4). The manor house enables the same mystery and study of the human psyche that the castle does but increases the familiarity of the setting to the readers, which allows the reader to more easily relate to the issues explored in the novel. The other site for Gothic study is the urban, which resembles many of the Gothic features of the castle in its vastness and disarray. It is Dickens who “establishes the city as a new Gothic space” and his urban environment, London, meets the Gothic castle as an equally Gothic setting (3). In Dickens’ novel *Bleak House*, Tom-All-Along’s, a “dark space of ‘tumbling tenements’ that ‘contain by night, a swarm of misery’” is a prime example of the Gothic (21). This setting continues the tradition of the personification of setting, in this case by “Dickens’s supernatural animation of disease, which is given consciousness enough to sow evil” which is personified as ‘Tom’ (21). In light of the urbanization resulting from the Industrialization, Gothic novels too are urbanized, allowing authors to compare the hardships of urban life to the ruin of the original Gothic castle and explore the issues experienced by a different class of people. While the settings in Victorian Gothic literature are different from those in classic Gothic literature in a move to portray more closely the lives of the readers in the move towards realism, they serve the same purpose and evoke many of the same emotions from readers.

Despite the move to realism in much of Victorian Gothic literature, the supernatural remains an integral part of many narratives. During this period, the ghost story itself became

more prevalent, developing “from an embedded narrative in a novel or miscellany into a distinct genre of short fiction which encompasses the brief, spooky anecdote and the technically elaborate and psychologically sophisticated tale” (Smith and Hughes 93). This prevalence has been credited to the “high mortality rates, very public displays of death and mourning and, at the same time, an increasing skepticism regarding Christian teachings” in the nineteenth century (106). In order to continue fulfilling its role in expressing the anxieties of its readers, the Victorian Gothic shifts its’ focus to death as the subject becomes more of a concern. In realist fiction, the supernatural is used to “add new depth and resonance” (95). Instead of trying to justify a suspension of disbelief, Victorian writers let the supernatural ““be obtrusive in a realistic world”” (97). The ghosts of realism are “an aspect of introspection which is defined by its introjection of a new anxiety about death and dying so that ‘Ghosts and spectres retain their ambiguous grip on the human imagination’” (157). Realism applies the Gothic element of the supernatural to study topics that cannot be fully explored with pure realism, which emphasizes the Gothic’s ability to deeply probe issues relevant to contemporary readers. While it may seem out of place at times, the supernatural was used in Gothic literature as a way of emphasis, in order to more deeply explore social anxieties particularly pertaining to death.

## 5. Conclusion

While Gothic literature saw change over the Victorian era, it was still recognizably Gothic. The Gothic’s ability to not only continue to exist but to thrive during the quickly changing social landscape of the Victorian era, both through pure Gothic fiction and Gothic hybrids with other genres, proves its importance as a literary genre. Its adaptability allows it to be applied by many other important genres, and to be shaped to fit the needs of the readers. What holds true throughout the changes the genre endures is the Gothic’s role as a medium through

which social anxieties can be expressed, which contributes to the Gothic's continued popularity, as well as to its application in other genres. An influential genre, the Gothic is both timeless, and a bridge to the past, showing what was on the hearts and minds of its contemporary readers, but also speaking to the soul of the modern reader.

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