

DIALECTIC

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STUDIES IN GOTHIC

"There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand."

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

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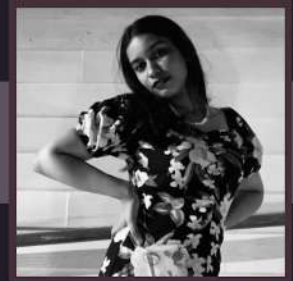
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Gothicism: A Revelation of the Evolution

By Khushi Kr. Grover and Arunma Bourai

othic as a term in the medieval ages carried the connotation of 'barbarism' and 'grotesque'. Horace Walpole first described his novel of 1764, *The Castle of Otranto* as a 'Gothic story'. He transformed the meaning of Gothic as an amalgamation of two conflicting ideologies: the "ancient" and the "modern". Walpole proposed, "In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success."

Clery and Miles stated that Walpole's novel seems to be an attempt to rejuvenate Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime which envisaged it as the highest form of aesthetics. The sublime was linked to "terror", "vastness", "notions of ghosts" and "obscurity", all of which were captured in *Otranto* yet there was no categorical parallel between the two. Anna Laetitia's essay, 'Sir Bertrand: A Fragment' became the tying knot between the two in 1773. It was almost a novennial when the first theory openly interacted with Gothic fiction.

Walpole's blended definition of Gothic attracted the critical attention of philosophers and literary critics of the age. Due to its popular appeal, especially to female readers, Gothic was perceived as a 'low' art form that relied on supernatural elements. Samuel Taylor Coleridge while assessing *The Monk* (1797), a horror-gothic fiction, stated that the "composition of species" was not up to the standard, hence he downgraded the genre. It was in this century that Gothic fiction and drama began to expand in England and swell out in other parts of the world - Western Europe and later America.

Frankenstein (1818) by Mary Shelly brings forth the anxieties of the Romantic period to the fore. The Gothic literature of this period challenges the norms of reason, control, and order which were the main pivots of the Enlightenment. *Frankenstein* explores the depths of human psychology through the elements of macabre and fantastic. This unconventional text also challenged the prevalent beliefs about religion and transgressive knowledge. The genre developed across various spheres - literary, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, and philosophical. It thus emerged as a flexible, hybrid, and interdisciplinary genre.

African-American writers have made significant contributions to the genre. For instance, Toni Morrison, in her Southern Gothic novel, *Beloved* (1987), articulates the postcolonial experience as the ghost of Sethe's baby symbolises the persecuted community's unconscious memory, who were traded in the transatlantic slave trade. As Maisha L. Wester' notes, Gothic here "becomes a way of

both mystifying and symbolising the living nightmare of racial oppression". Sethe's house, 124 Bluestone Road being "loud", "spiteful" and "quiet" iterates the classic Gothic convention of a desolate "castle" often having a mystery attached to it. The personification of the place not only adds to the figurative language, a quality of Gothic texts, but also depicts the haunting house as the physical incarnation of the baby ghost. Furthermore, the memories of Sethe's past which haunt her future again emphasise the Gothic. Physical spaces often become a site of the uncanny, as in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre's* red room and *Thornfield Hall*, while Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" utilizes the isolated countryside estate.

In the post-industrial society, the Gothic symbols and figures, especially vampires and zombies, have been used to express the class disparity, dehumanization, and the systematic oppression of the proletariat in the capitalist economy. The pandemic has given rise to many philosophical enquiries, questioning the significance and the ephemeral nature of human life, and their resilience in the face of adversities. The grim reality of increasing mortality rates, mistreatment of the vulnerable, and the sheer callousness of the affluent painted a nightmarish reality. Post the catastrophe of the pandemic, a newfound fascination for the Gothic genre was evident, perhaps due to the realization of the uncertainty of life.

Dhiti, through this newsletter, wishes to delve into the genre 'Gothic' in its various iterations. Its enduring appeal is evident in its ability to adapt and evolve across ages and manifest through various modes to express the inexpressible. By branching out into the discourses concerning Gothic fiction, subculture, regional folk tales, as well as modern television series, we intend to present a holistic perspective of the word 'Gothic'.

Shimla and the “Gothic”

By Priyamvada Sharma



PICTURE THIS:

As the wind passes through, the fine needles of evergreen Deodar trees block the last bit of moonlight in the translucent foggy night, it produces a soothing, yet haunting whistle. As one walks on the road carved in the forest, the looming danger of the unknown and known: supernatural and wild beasts both leave one terrorised.

Such gloomy and mysterious scenery gives context to Shimla's stories and folklore, which is impregnated with the intrinsic tendencies of the human psyche, beliefs, and the need for survival.

The *Bansheera* (the resident of the *ban* or forest) is a mythical creature considered so tall, its head cannot be seen. Traditionally, the oracle of the *Bansheera* would prophesize and warn about the weather conditions, rain and snow, and the turnover of the crops on the thirteenth day of the Hindu month of *Bhadrapad*. Every clan of every village has a different ancestral deity that they worship, these Gods similarly have various subordinates or servants that the locals invoke in difficult times. *Nahrsinh* (not to be confused with the Hindu god) is believed to be the servant of *Shirgul Devta*. He is said to be a silent, white-clad figure, who emerges by someone's side in times of such emergencies, walking with them through the entire ordeal.

Omens, visions, ancient prophecies, inexplicable events, suspense, and high emotion are subsumed under the rubric of Gothic. The presence of the *Bansheera* in the forest could be perceived as a response to the fear of navigating in the wild as well as preparing for climactic adversity and food shortage in the harsh topography and snow. Similarly, the invoking of *Nahrsinh* and similar figures in unpredictable circumstances express the human tendency to grasp the literal hand of hope whether it is late night commute or the death of a loved one. These are not just instances of cultural products of fear and survival but it is also, simply, the devotion of the locals. Pahadi folklore attributes the unknown to an ambiguous domain and not just the domain of horror. This is evident due to the observance of *Dagayali*, a day when the in-between beings are allowed to roam free.

When Shimla became the Summer Capital of the British, it gave birth to several urban legends and hauntings. Immense colonial structures of creaking wood and gritty stone with their carvings, crevices, and shadows, conjure a climate of mystery and darkness. A well-talked-about “*Chudail Baudi*” is situated on the way to a missionary school in Navbahar, initially set up for British children in 1886. It is believed that passing cars slow

down on their own and an old white woman asks for a lift, who leaps into the car anyway. Stories about a white prince - a headless phantom, searching for a bride on Friday the thirteenth in a Shimla school are also heard wherein he leaves a red rose in the dormitory bed of the girl he kidnaps, never to be seen again.

Writing about Scandal Point which is situated on the way to The Ridge on The Mall Road, Historian Pamela Kanwar notes: “People tend to believe rumour more than official reports; rumour satisfies the need for mystery.” The origin of its name has been attributed to several of these myths, one of them is about the eloping of the Maharaja of Patiala with the Viceroy's daughter. Some senior locals of Shimla narrate that any Indian walking around after dark would be seized by the British Police. His head would be shaved, his skull punctured, and hung upside down to allow the brain fluid, ‘Ram Tel’. This liquid was supposedly carted off to assorted war fronts to treat the wounded.

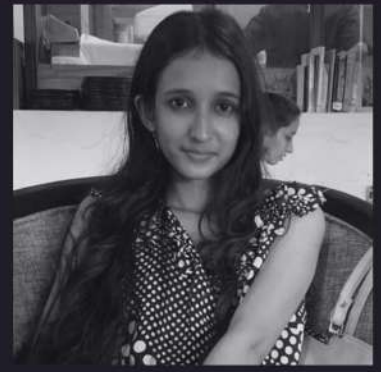
Such stories present the aura of the dread and trauma of colonialism, persisting in the subconscious of the locals to this day and further replenishing the reservoir of haunting encounters in Shimla.

The people of Shimla district revere their vibrant *jaatars*, which are magnificent tableaux of the respective *Devi/Devta* carried by the assigned group of travelling men on foot to celebrations flooded by devotees. Such is the rich repository of beliefs, folklore, and community values. This immense exuberance in the backdrop of harsh topography and weather tells a tale of survival and celebration of the human experience against all odds. While urbanisation has made life easier, a majority of locals are distinctly still connected to their rural roots and continue to maintain their ancestral fields and apple orchards. They venerate their ancestors and turn to this repository of beliefs and stories frequently, both in times of celebration and grief.

While these “gothic” elements of the folklore are not the only part of it, making the folklore visible to whatever extent helps subvert the imposed homogenisation of culture and celebrate the varied voices and beliefs of the people of the hills, distinct from one another as well as the rest of North India.

The Gothic Legacy: Music and Goth Subculture

By Vaishnavi Singh



The word 'Goth' in the twenty-first century brings to mind images of teenagers dressed in black from head to toe, with spiked hair and dark mascaras. Seemingly edgy teenagers may have little in common with philosophical questions concerning life and death. However, they belong to a subculture that carries forward an age-old style of expression with its emphasis on the obscure and unsettling.

A subculture is any distinct cultural group wherein people bond based on a shared taste in music or other interests. Many well-known subcultures are characterized by their deviation from the mainstream. Sociologist Dick Hebdige has defined subcultures as symptoms of political breakdown through which young people seek to express their distrust in the dominant bourgeois society. Every subculture has a set of recognizable cultural identifiers. Goths are recognised for their appreciation for gothic arts, a musical preference for gloomy lyrics and sharp but melodic sounds, and monochrome fashion.

The Goth Subculture of the late twentieth century emerged in the United Kingdom amidst a severe economic crisis. Migration waves in the 1950s and 1970s coincided with a rise in poverty and low standards of living. Feelings of urban alienation paved the way for youth subcultures to express their frustration through artistic outlets. Goth music established itself as a more introspective and melancholy outgrowth of Punk. The modern gothic assertion of rebellion and anti-normativity finds its inspiration in the countercultural nature of the traditional gothic. Associations of the gothic with death and destruction date back to the Visigoth invasion of the Roman Empire. The transgressive themes of gothic literature, which was largely a reaction to the rigidity of preceding ages, remain relevant today.

The English Romantics have influenced rock music since the 1960s. Musicians like Bob Dylan and The Doors referred to William Blake's poetry in their songs. The lyrics of Goth rock also derive heavily from literature. The band Bauhaus' popular single 'Dark Entries' was inspired by Oscar Wilde's gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Lead vocalist Peter Murphy was impressed by Wilde's story of "great narcissism and [an] esoteric interior." In an interview, he maintained, "It's a rock star's story." Bands often employ literary techniques to make their lyrics stand out. Joy Division's prowess in creating music out of retrospective gloom makes

them popular among fans of goth music. In their song 'Dead Souls,' the band uses ghostly imagery to reproduce the aloofness felt in an empty and futile world. Lead singer Ian Curtis sings about "figures from the past" who "stand tall" as "mocking voices ring the halls." Joy Division is known for the striking effect of its lyrical repetitions. In one of the band's most popular songs, 'Disorder,' Curtis repeats the verse "I've got the spirit/ but lose the feeling" multiple times as he mourns a state of emotional apathy.

Goth musicians' fashion is part of their performance. Dyed black hair, monochrome clothing, and black cosmetics are used to achieve a theatrical effect. Even though David Bowie was not a goth musician, he was a style icon for the up-and-coming goth subculture. Goth fans take references from historical periods to design their outfits. Ancient Celtic and Druidic symbols as well as Victorian clothing styles are popular with modern goths. Newer renditions of goth fashion create elaborate costumes inspired by horror and science fiction. Sociologists refer to the fashion of this subculture as a subversive style. The prevalent androgynous look provides goth fans with a platform to explore alternate personas and fantasies. Through their fashion, goths explore the social boundaries between femininity and masculinity, past and present.

Even though the gothic mode of expression is adopted only by a subset of people, its reemergence through the ages proves its relevance across time. Like all things that seek to survive for a long time, the gothic tradition has undergone several changes. Music is a relatively modern addition to the aesthetic and one that has a global appeal instead of only a Western one. With the increasing accessibility of global music and the presence of virtual goth communities, goth music has now been adopted by people of colour as well. Goth communities are especially welcoming towards people who are on the margins of society. As a result of globalisation, gothic truly has become a cross-cultural tradition.

From Genre to Subculture: Goth as a Non-Conformist Tool

By Kaivalya



Eerie, dark, unsettling, edgy - these are the images that the word Goth evokes. Contrary to the popular imagination, it is not just an artistic fad but is an inherently resistive nature that has contested the normative across ages. The traditional elements of a gothic novel range from being set in a castle surrounded by an air of mystery and suspense, to supernatural or inexplicable events, omens, visions, fierce emotions, and of course, a heroine in extreme distress. These elements allowed a writer to provide a refreshing take on an otherwise mundane world.

Furthermore, under the gothic rubric, women writers were provided with the opportunity to question and challenge societal and patriarchal norms that thrust them into the domestic spheres, considered more suitable for them. As Ellen Moers remarks in "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother", for Radcliffe, "Gothic was a device to set maidens on distant and exciting journeys without offending the proprieties". Mary Shelley brought into consideration an unprecedented idea through gothic motifs in her novel *Frankenstein* (1818). Shelley did away with what was considered integral to a gothic novel - the perturbed heroine. She performed perhaps the biggest transgression by shifting the onus of the "birth" of the creature onto the father, removing the 'female' from the process entirely. Moreover, *Frankenstein's* repulsion after the creature's birth speaks further of her decision to tackle a new subject - the trauma of afterbirth. Guilt, horror, and revenge were rarely grouped with the act of birth before Shelley.

The Brontë sisters reintroduced the female protagonist by publishing two of the most classic romance stories in 1847, and both contested the norm. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* was a romantic tragedy that introduced a new hero - dark, brooding, and mysterious. The supernatural was prevalent for a major part of the story, where Catherine haunts Heathcliff for the remainder of his life. David Punter and Glennis Byron in their essay "The Gothic" note that by presenting Catherine as a restless ghost and Heathcliff as a vampire, the novel "appropriates Gothic motifs to explore questions of desire, obsession and fear" Additionally, Brontë stated class conflict as the reason behind Catherine and Heathcliff's failed union, an issue rarely ever confronted in the Victorian era of romance.

Through *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë challenged the institution of patriarchy itself. The gothic was invoked time and again through various supernatural elements - young Jane's imprisonment in the Red Room, the voices that finally united Jane and Rochester, and especially through Bertha's 'preternatural laughter' and her gait akin to that of a 'wild hyena'. Brontë cleverly personified the patriarchy in Rochester, and in Jane's double Bertha - everything a Victorian woman wasn't supposed to be - expressive of her emotions. Brontë spun the "damsel-in-distress" trope as well, by not only having Bertha 'destroy' Rochester in a sense but also

reversing the power dynamic between Jane and Rochester, making a case for financial independence for women. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's use of Gothic was similar to that of Brontë in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). The husband, John was the embodiment of patriarchy and the yellow wallpaper represents the prison that engaged her. Shelley's theme of the trauma of afterbirth was reintroduced when the narrator is caged immediately after giving birth. It could be read as Gilman's commentary on the viewing of women as obsolete after reproduction. The story has more pronounced gothic notes, with the woman lurking in the wallpaper being representative of female rage, terrorising and eventually leading to the breakdown of the narrator.

Goth as a literary genre facilitated female empowerment right from the nineteenth Century. In the 1980s, it emerged as a subculture from the musical genre of 'Goth Rock'. The ideology of the goth subculture is believed to be a descendant of the Punk movement, albeit a more subtle rebellion against oppressive norms, with an enhanced focus on the cultivation of one's identity. The goth scene was the very first site of free expression in a safe community of like-minded people. It promoted sexual empowerment and gender egalitarianism long before it was even recognised by society. In her essay "So Full of Myself as a Chick: Goth Women, Sexual Independence, and Gender Egalitarianism", Amy Wilkins states that "the Goth subculture encourages dramatic interpretations of femininity, adding both to the sense of play and the ability of a wider range of women to participate".

Goth even challenged the binary of fashion right from the eighties. Androgyny is a major part of gothic fashion; with all genders witnessing adorning lace corsets, skirts, bondage gear, leather guises, white foundation, and black eyeliner. The focus is on an individualistic expression of identity whilst defying restrictive norms that preclude people from being active participants in society.

However, the community's acceptance of all races, genders, and sexualities doesn't ensure the lack of prejudices in itself. The stereotype of pale white skin contrasting with dark black has been long associated with goth and is quite Eurocentric. However, the recent participation of South Asian members in the community has not only broken the stereotype but also helped create a close-knit community dealing with similar cultural-based issues. The fact remains that over the ages, goth has aided an individual's dynamic participation in society, irrespective of their identity, and hopefully will continue to do so.

Religion and Goth

By Ummey Kulsoom Shah



The goth subculture first appeared in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a punk rock musical subgenre. Still, it has since grown to encompass art, literature, fashion, and other kinds of creative expression. It is identified by a fixation with horror and macabre themes and a dark, gloomy aesthetic that includes black attire. The goth subculture frequently rejects traditional religious beliefs instead of a non-traditional, more individualistic approach to spirituality. Goth is often associated with themes of darkness, morbidity, and rebellion. The perception of death is one of the main areas of disagreement between goth culture and religious beliefs. While some goths have adopted secular lifestyles in place of faith, others have chosen alternative spiritual practices like paganism or Wicca. Goths embrace a more glamorous or nihilistic perspective of death than many religions, which see death as an inevitable consequence of life and hold to the idea of an afterlife. Religion is associated with themes of light, salvation, and obedience and has a rich history of mystical practices and esoteric knowledge. Goth and Religion are two ends of one scale and have a complex and entwined relation as both offer ways to connect with something greater than ourselves and seek to find meaning in a chaotic world.

In the Indian subcontinent, the relationship between religion and Gothic culture is intertwined yet perplexing. It is a syncretic space where many faith systems and traditions coexist. Every one of these traditions has its own distinctive set of beliefs and customs, and each one has contributed significantly to the development of Indian culture. The robust goth subculture, which is characterized by a love of darkness, a fascination with death and morbidity, and a rejection of mainstream society, is also present in India. The dynamic between religion and goth culture is multifaceted in India for a multitude of reasons. The presence of various religions has led to different goth subcultures and there is no **universality** in their relations as each religion holds a unique outlook towards goth culture.

In Hinduism, some deities are associated with death and destruction such as Goddess Kali and God Shiva hence, some goths in India who practice Hinduism believe that their gothic identity is acceptable with their religious principles. They might regard their interest in death and the dark as a type of devotion to these Gods, and they might perceive their goth identity as a way to communicate their spiritual views. On the

other hand, some practitioners of Hinduism may view goth culture as being incompatible with their religious beliefs; they may believe that death and morbidity are contrary to the concept of reincarnation in Hinduism, which teaches the rebirth of the soul after death.

Islam also holds a variegated perspective on goth culture as well, some Muslims may believe that their goth beliefs are compatible with their religious values and that their fascination to explore *jinn*s or the unknown is justifiable. They may view their connection with the dark as a method to investigate the enigmatic and unexplored facets of their religion. At the same time, some practitioners of Islam may believe goth culture is contradictory to their values. The relationship between religion and goth culture in India is further complicated by the nation's history of cultural interchange.

Practitioners of goth culture in India often believe in the presence of demons, evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery. The values may vary based on the associated religion but the practice remains the same. There have been many instances where people with a religious backdrop have put a facade to possess the knowledge of the unknown and manipulated people through superstitious rituals. In India, many tribal cultures consider witchcraft and sorcery to be real. For instance, the Baiga, a tribe in central India's Madhya Pradesh state that has about 200,000 people worship an ever-changing pantheon of deities. Priests, medicine men, and clairvoyants are some of their religious leaders. Similarly, some religious practitioners claim to have the power to control the *jinn*s which helps them to solve problems of health, income, fertility and revenge.

In the Indian subcontinent, the relationship between religion and goth culture is intricate and multifaceted, defying simple classification. There is an attraction to the occult among goths because it offers a means of exploring the unknown and forbidden. In a world that can often feel empty and meaningless, they see it as a way to connect with something greater than themselves. The interconnectedness of religion, culture and the goth still holds a mystical aura that holds the potential to be explored further. By delving further into these perplexing factors one can gain a profound understanding of human nature and their desire to seek greater meaning in life.

Wednesday as American Gothic

By Harshita Choudhary



"Little did I know I would be stepping into a nightmare. Full of mystery, mayhem, and murder. I think I'm going to love it here." - Wednesday Addams

Spooky, gloomy, dark, evil, and horrifying - these are the adjectives one often associates with the Gothic, which is both a genre and an aesthetic. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, is seen as the first Gothic novel. Afterwards, many famous works from this genre were produced, like Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk* by Mathew Lewis. The second wave of Gothic novels in the Victorian era witnessed acclaimed works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The Bronte sisters also included Gothic elements in their novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* respectively. The British Gothic focused on the aspects of terror through the usage of vampires, monsters or zombies. It involved literary techniques like multiple plots and narrators which added to its hybridity. Thus, Gothic as a genre comes from its long history involving violence, civil wars and the socio-political conflicts of the age.

Gothic literature came to America in the nineteenth century, which was a significant and turbulent period in American history. While it initially faced issues finding traction, it was appropriate to write about the oppression witnessed due to Slavery. It also expressed the underlying fear, inequality and nightmare beneath the so-called "American Dream" of liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness. Another feature that sets American Gothic apart is that it conceptualises horror through psychological violence. It uses complex themes linking human minds with past and present, dreams and nightmares. Rhetorical devices like personification, imagery, symbolism, etc. are used to create vivid and impactful impressions in the readers' minds. These techniques are found in the works of Edgar Allen Poe, the father of American Gothic horror. The history of slavery, racism, colonialism, Puritan intolerance, and a dark-traumatic past has found expression in this genre, like in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Therefore, it can be said, American writers expanded the horizon of the Gothic genre.

Wednesday, the latest American gothic series directed and produced by Tim Burton has predominant elements of the American Gothic. This show is an expansion of the story of the youngest daughter of the Addams Family, Wednesday. Her character, which initially was solemn and gloomy yet had a sweet disposition; has over the period turned into a goth icon. The series is set in Nevermore Academy, a fictional academy for outcasts and those deemed "abnormal" by their supernatural abilities. The aesthetic of Nevermore is mysterious, gloomy and spooky. The scenes of the academy were filmed at Cantacuzino Castle in Romania under the influence of Bucharest architecture which also connects it with European gothic.

The dormitory where Wednesday resides has a cobweb window to it and all around the academy are statues of eerie creatures and places like the secret library room. The secret library is a mystery to other students except for the chosen few of the 'Nightshades Society' which was founded in 1600 by Wednesday's ancestor, Goody Addams. The society was believed to have been disbanded but, to everyone's surprise, it comes to light as the mystery unfolds.

A significant element that makes the series gothic is the mysterious monster who is later discovered to be Hyde, a call back to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Hyde is discovered by Wednesday due to her psychic vision, a feature of the Gothic, which acts like a dream, nightmare, and foresight. Apart from these, there are certain recurrent symbols and references to Poe. Raven, based on the poem by Poe, is seen as a perpetual reminder of darkness, loss, and death. In his poem, the term 'Nevermore' has been used as a reply to him from Raven while in the series Poe has been shown as an alumnus of Nevermore academy. Even the competition, Poe Cup, is named after him. Wednesday, just like Poe, is an outcast who tries to find happiness within oneself.

The second reference is to the Salem witch trials or hunting in the seventeenth century. Women and outcasts, marginalised by society, were executed by the Puritan Pilgrims for their "heretic" beliefs and supposed pact with the Devil. This can be linked to the Gothic element that tries to voice the suffering that cannot be expressed in mainstream discourse. Goody Addams was tormented along with her group of outcast women by Joseph Crackstone. Although later killed by Goody, his successors, the Gates Family attempted to maintain the tradition and Thornhill, a member of that family almost succeeded in resurrecting Crackstone to ignite the age-old cruelty. But Wednesday manages to foil her mission by destroying Crackstone through the supernatural power that she acquired from Goody's wandering soul whom she used to see in her psychic visions.

According to Morticia, the name Wednesday, was taken from a nursery rhyme, 'Monday's Child' which states, "Wednesday's child is full of woe." Pugsley and Wednesday's aunt, Ophelia Frump, was an inspiration for the name of the dorm as 'Ophelia Hall'. And many such symbols have been used throughout the series, making it full of gothic as well as literary and historical knowledge which attracts the audience and makes them spellbound as they watch the series. *Wednesday* thus stands as a phenomenal testimony to the relevance of the Gothic genre.

Gothic and Gender

By Malavika Manikandan



During the rise of Gothic Literature in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, women were considered second-class citizens. Hence, the heroine in Gothic novels was presented as beautiful and virtuous who suffered great misfortune at the hands of a male villain and was a trophy for the hero's bravery. Even the classification of gothic literature required the presence of a typically fragile and vulnerable damsel in distress for the heroes to rescue. Oftentimes, this innocent young girl was depicted as the potential victim of the unrestrained desire of the villainous pursuer. If it was a woman playing a villainous role then she was either a hideous and undesirable woman who was mainly jealous of other women or a mysterious and seductive woman whose charms were condemned by the men and also sought to destroy them.

Ellen Moers coined the term 'Female Gothic' in her book *Literary Women*. She categorized this literature as being not merely a writing by women but also an expression of women's fears of entrapment within both the domestic and the female body. The novels in this genre also express their discontent with the patriarchy and its suppression of women. The Female Gothic generally contains victimized, virginal women pursued by villainous men, logical or explained supernatural elements and sexual liberation. It offered a wide range of female depictions such as domestic governesses that needed saving, modern and self-reliant characters, disgraced young women, or even the embodiment of evil. Male Gothic incorporates disrupted gender customs, graphic horror, and women as instruments for male gratification. Women were objectified as unnatural and artificial and presented negatively. This is of course, in contrast with Female Gothic fiction, which showcases women as victims and questions their identity. They also introduce the idea of literary heroines moving from "innocence to experience" while the woman's time is spent in nature, castles, and fortresses allowing her to "assert her independence" in her domain. In the male Gothic, however, heroes continuously attempt to dominate women by penetrating their castles as an extension of their bodies.

Several female gothic texts feature female characters who endeavored to subvert social standards yet are eventually forced into submission by male characters who use their masculinity as a weapon of strength over the weakness of femininity. The narrative action of Christina Rossetti's gothic fantasy poem, "The Goblin Market" hinges upon Lizzie giving in to her temptation and tasting the fruit. This weakness is attributed to the "evil gifts" of the Goblin men implying that their masculine seduction was too powerful for a female to resist and hence, is not the fault of the stereotypically simple-minded woman. However, Rossetti utilizes these gender stereotypes to blur the lines of contrast between them. Although Laura portrays characteristics of the virginal angel due to her willingness to self-sacrifice for her sister and remains pure through her resistance to the fruit, the decision to actively search for the goblins, her defiance, and the experience of the encounter results in a partial loss of innocence.

Therefore, her actions are a juxtaposition of both the ideal of the fallen woman and that of the angel of the house because she is neither completely fallen nor completely innocent. Although Laura is categorized as a sinful fallen woman she does not suffer from guilt which seems to suggest that a desire for knowledge and the breaking of gender expectations is not something that should evoke remorse. Rossetti presents the fallen woman as a victim of curiosity, lack of knowledge, and restricting social boundaries. Laura is eventually healed and accepted back into domestic society as a wife and mother. Lizzie and Laura act as gothic doubles of the virginal angel and the fallen woman, yet they seemingly break down the unrealistic extremes of feminine classification in Victorian culture. Rossetti thus proposes an alternative view of women as neither uncompromising angels nor unredeemable fallen women but as unified under the title of the woman.

However, the poem demonstrates that there is a fine line between being a socially acceptable gender character and warnings for certain gender portrayals. Laura's attempts to overcome her gender restrictions by allowing her curiosity to control her cause her misfortune. Laura's punishment for going against the norm pushes her to comply with the social standards imposed on her and bear the persona of the stereotypical female character. Even though female liberation is encouraged, there seems to be a condition for said liberation. Feminine progression is only acceptable if women remain submissive to the will of their male counterparts and subvert norms within the boundaries set by men. Therefore, it can be observed that both Male and Female Gothic Literature exhibit competition for control of the patriarchy; neither side is anti-patriarchal. Hence, female gothic writers find themselves absorbing and undermining gothic and feminism to create a space for themselves in this male-dominated genre. Despite multiple leaps made by Female Gothic traditions, it continues to be limited by the shackles of patriarchy and the roles that women have to perform.

The Spellbinding Archives of Gothic Witches

By Shrutika and Swati Thakur



Folklore related to witches has been around for hundreds, if not thousands of years and it still holds an important status in some cultures throughout the world. Witches are not something new to literature. Literature has produced numerous witches and continues to do so, from ancient Greek mythology to modern witches like Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series. It is interesting to see their evolution from the supernatural and horror to their popular association with the Gothic genre. The earliest appearances of them can be found in the ancient legends of Greek gods, where Titan's only daughter, Hecate is blessed with the powers of witchcraft. Unlike the later popular archetype of witches, Hecate is a goddess, thus neither particularly ugly nor an evil supernatural creature. Instead, it is believed to be summoned to protect from the evil spirits or ghosts.

One of the most enduring images of witches is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. They are conceived as hideous and disfigured creatures who are forbearers of inauspicious fate and whose ugliness reflects their inner nature of satanic evil. Contrary to this, the early representation of witches shows them as possessors of magical healing abilities that could benefit society. Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, presents a witch similar to Hecate in terms of magic as healing. While she turns into a villain later in the Arthurian legends, she is portrayed as a healer in Monmouth's chivalric romances. She is a tempest with an unrequited love for king Arthur which though remaining unfulfilled yet manages to heal the wounded king in the Battle of Camlann. In the eighteenth century, works of Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis included gore and grotesque as part of the Gothic genre.

Witches, vampires, and other fantastic creatures, all represent the mysterious and irrational part of common reality. Witches became more horrid and began to embody the shadows of Gothic. 'Snow White' and 'Hansel & Gretel' from Grimm's Fairy Tales are recognised as one of the earliest Gothic texts to import a witch in their stories. 'Snow White' and 'Hansel and Gretel' are both set in an isolated dark forest with an uncanny presence. The witches shown in the tales are ugly as their souls, cannibalistic in nature, and eat children rather than producing or rearing them. Their evil discourses take place in the bleak foreboding environment with extreme weather and areas far away from civilization. Gothic witches differed from the older witches in an enhanced sense of terror. When juxtaposed with the innocent, suppressed, and good-natured heroines of these tales, the hedonistic and evil witches enhance their qualities of beauty, passivity, and innocence, and act as foil to the "virgin in distress" figure. Both are the victims of society yet only one challenges its parameters and thus becomes evil while the one with passivity and silence gains the fruit of good.

Witches embody the mirrored reality of terror associated with socially transgressive women who withhold power from the male patriarch. Their representation in modern media is quite different from their previous versions, both in terms of beauty as well as their very nature. The Gothic witch is not a social outcast living in isolation, she lives with ordinary folks with self-respect and dignity. She is neither necessarily evil nor an angelic healer. Unlike the older

witches, she is portrayed as conventionally feminine. Her abilities are subversive - dominance and power through illusion, fantasy and magic. The contemporary witch is not a child killer, in fact in the popular media their representations highlight their maternal role as well. With Samantha of *Bewitched*, and Bonnie from *The Vampire Diaries*, a strong legacy of independent mothers can be observed, who have the desire to be mothers and nurture their knowledge to their children, even those witches who are depicted as evil. Like Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series, the modern witches are not pitiable victims of evil society who then decide to turn evil themselves, as the contemporary witch challenges the dominant institutions of her society. The body of a modern witch is also quite unlike its previous counterparts. From the ugly old hag, she is transformed into an alluring and sensual figure who can charm people. She no longer evokes disgust or is an outcast. The recent Netflix series, *The Witcher*, imagines the witch as male, who like his female counterparts, is a conqueror of magical abilities but uses his abilities to remove evil rather than produce it. The radical transformation of the image of witches has its origin in the feminist movements and the emergence of female Gothic writers.

But these transformations have not erased the Gothic nature of the witches entirely. The "evil" mystic witch still holds a power that simple humans do not. The contemporary setting of gothic witches includes castles, spooky basements, dungeons, labyrinths, and supernatural fearful specters. It may have transformed itself into an eye-pleasing surreal beauty but that is an illusion. She retains the Gothic element of sublime nature, mystery, paranormal, and more importantly—dread. Her very presence challenges the norms of the society and continues to fill terrors into the hearts of simple folks.

Gothic Fiction : A Psychoanalytic Take

By Sachi Jain and Anushka Dabadhe



"The uncanny is something hidden which ought to have remained missed but which is brought to light"
- "Uncanny", Sigmund Freud

As David Punter notes, the Gothic genre refers to "the unarticulated, or the games of the mind." Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) interrogates the anxieties of the era while being rooted in the experiences of the author. The source of the conflict in the text is Victor's abandonment of his creation based on its appearance. Any character who rests its eyes on the creature is disgusted by it, which shows how deeply rooted the notion of "othering" is in the human psyche where any difference becomes a reason to exclude and marginalize.

1816 was the 'year without a summer.' This was the circumstance that prompted Mary Shelley to write about the eerie settings and unusual weather in *Frankenstein*. The weather impacts the mind of the characters too. Calm weather represents peace of mind whereas unsteady weather foreshadows tumult and instability.

An author's life and circumstances shape their creative outpourings. This is evident in the works of Mary Shelley as well as Charlotte Brontë. Shelley lost her second child due to premature birth and was haunted by the hallucinations of the baby. Similarly, Victor Frankenstein was also haunted by the vision of his dead mother, "I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave worms crawling in the folds of the flannel." Shelley and Frankenstein both beheld the memories of the one they love and remembered their loved ones in one form or other. The concept of madness and insanity are common themes in

Gothic literature. The text posits the creature as a tabula rasa, a blank slate, who is innately good but is corrupted by the cruelty that society heaped on it. The creature's continuous rejection by society influences the creature to commit crimes. The text makes it abundantly clear that if the creature was accepted and treated with kindness, he would not have turned out to be abominable and frightful. The text shows the nature of "monstrosity" that is socially constructed rather than something inherent.

In *Jane Eyre*, the author uses gothic elements which are infused with the insecurities and abuses of the main character, Jane. For instance, the red-room, where Jane's aunt Mrs Reed locks Jane up for misbehaving seems to have a gothic connotation. It feels similar to the castle of Count Dracula. Jane feels imprisoned in the red-room and so did the human victim who was in a 'never-ending cage' which will never result in any kind of freedom. Both the cases have similarities, as in Jane's case, she had to look out for freedom from the horrors of her past. For instance, Bertha Mason represents "madness" in *Jane Eyre*. Meanwhile, the gothic element which created the aura of mystery in the story was the result of Bertha's suffering from a then-unknown psychological dysfunction. Some of the renowned doctors of that time may have classified it as hysteria, a mental disease designed especially for women. But after the introduction of psychology as a discipline, critics have noted that might have been suffering from schizophrenia, which was evident by her violent outbursts, laughing without a reason and a disillusioned reality. The mentally disabled Bertha Mason along with the gloomy weather and atmosphere of Thornfield created many gothic elements which conspired

with the story of Jane Eyre.

Many famous texts of Gothic fiction were written way before the discipline of Psychology was firmly established and thus some of the works of Gothic fiction previously appeared to have been influenced by a variety of scientific theories which were predominant in the late Victorian era. In Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, we see Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde as separate entities in the first part of the novella while revealing in the end that they were, evidently the same person. The transformation, created by a scientific experiment gone wrong, shows its repercussions and Stevenson's portrayal places it firmly in the gothic genre. As many critics confirm, the transformation mirrors what the modern century calls a 'split personality'. Dr Jekyll, a highly-known doctor in the city, a man with a serene expression and an intellect none shall surpass, becomes Mr Hyde, a raging murderer by night. One can witness the gothic elements present in the story by retrieving the concepts of shady murders and uncanny events which give a darker theme to the story. Nevertheless, it revolves into a figment of dark thoughts which are produced by the psyche of the mind, the mother of all gothic, indeed.

Victorian and Gothic Ideals of Women in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

By Shruti Dhaka and Sanjana Jha

iterature holds a mirror to society by reflecting the socio-political realities.

The depiction of women in fiction is thus rooted in the anxieties of the age. The Victorian era expected women to be submissive, passive, and self-sacrificing. They were to sublimate themselves and engage in work that fit the restrictive gender role of a caring mother and wife, encapsulated in the image of the "Angel in the House".

The Victorian literature is replete with depictions of women based on these gendered norms. Monsieur Paul in Charlotte Bronte's *Villette* says, "A woman of intellect is a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife or worker". This encapsulates the patriarchal approach towards women and the rigid social construct in which they were supposed to confine themselves. Gothic, while no longer a dominant genre during the Victorian era, survived through its literary tropes that found ground in the newer genres. It represented women conventionally by showing them as repressed, dependent, and tied to the private sphere, with deviations from these ideals seen as transgressive.

Aware of the repressive norms of Victorian society, Oscar Wilde presented the female characters of his most celebrated Gothic novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, according to the conventions of the period. Gothic literature often has two contrasting conceptions of women - either as an innocent, pure, domestic figure, who plays a limited and submissive role, or the nonconformist transgressive one that is seen as a deviant figure.

Wilde's novel analyzes and questions the trauma of women oppressed by patriarchy and stifling mores. Lady Henry's weak-mindedness and lack of worldly knowledge other than what she hears from her husband makes her fall under the category of the stereotypical helpless and dependent female character. She doesn't have a voice of her own.

We see this side of hers during a party where she converses with Dorian. Lord Henry's notions about women are derogatory as he says that "no woman is a genius: women are a decorative sex" and that "they never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly." The societal and sexual objectification of women has had such a deep impact on the psyche of women that the women in the novel have internalised the misogyny. But eventually, Lady Henry tries to get rid of the influence that Lord Henry had over her through divorce. The angel in the house, the ideal woman who always worshiped her husband, becomes the "fallen" woman isolated by society.

Lady Henry's situation is quite relatable to the fear and anxiety experienced by women who were afraid simultaneously of being trapped in stifling, repressive roles and of being rejected or isolated for challenging these prescribed roles during the Victorian period. The figurative and literal imprisonment of women in the web of defined societal norms seemed to be the actual cause of their



adversities. They were subconsciously haunted by freedom and the 'what ifs?'. Sarah M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* argue that the biggest oppression that women have faced is being called the 'second sex', because they could not "express themselves freely without the fear of censure." So women felt the need to subdue themselves. They didn't voice their opinions, and they made sure that they acted like 'lady' at all times.

The tragic heroine of the novel, Sybil Vane, embodies the more traditional values of Victorian society. A poor, innocent, and weak-hearted young girl falls in love with her "Prince Charming" but by the end gets her heart broken by Dorian as he realizes that she "knows nothing of life". Her character suffers degradation as after falling in love with Dorian, she flinders in her acting and becomes a more shallow character. She put Dorian at the centre of her life and is oblivious of the supernatural events occurring throughout the novel. She is thus an ideal Gothic female protagonist who is easily scared, takes no time in falling in love, and becomes a symbol of innocence and purity. Unable to bear the cruelty, she commits suicide. The fairy tale world of Sybil is in contrast with the dark and hideous world of Dorian. The man who sold his soul to the devil and a woman who was way too innocent and young to understand such dark forces brings out and highlights the Gothic elements greatly.

The representation of women can be culturally, historically, and socially linked to their position within a patriarchal society. The Victorian idea of femininity was quite a dominant facet of most of the earliest Gothic works. The female archetype of the innocent maiden and femme fatale are evident here. Wilde portrayed his female characters as a symbol of oppression that existed in Victorian society. He mocked society's confinement of women, fallen or not, into prescribed roles. The elegant horror and the classic gothic tale of Wilde therefore not only illustrates the ugliness that exists in Dorian's portrait and soul but also in the society's treatment of women.

By Mansi Sachdeva

By Ridhima Uppal



Through the south ends to firsts
you love the land,
though you claim for sea.
To rush to the blooming fields
with clenched joe-pye weeds
you bled your hands.
To burn the witches of fate,
for fishes, now you're in vain,
and I'm the phantom and the bane.

Faded the strings, faded the ties,
sweet pallets, fine lines,
you say they never existed.
Running to the woods to save the leaves,
but the roots were dying under the grayest eaves,
again, you vained all your efforts.
To save children who don't belong,
from the commander who's anything but wrong,
you went from death to life, yet, lost.

I walked past the dazzling halls, were they,
always the infernal whites?
I've ran down the grayest stairs all my nights,
did you have to change them into white lights?
I trip and stumble every day to your screams and my
silences,
when did I become the lion to your false tales?

I fly in the ribbed cart, the gold cage,
the free land, my heritage, but I grew with her,
the archer, the master, the Leo, the dreamer,
it was her womb, I was stolen, I'm too cold for here.

And I shall call up on my horses to carry me
to the daisy-fields, with Wyola Frist, I shall be frolicking,
this grass is green but it's deadly,
I did not mean to water your territory.

The heading for my gravestone
"Not suicidal but thought about dying sometimes"
Fits a bit too perfectly don't you think
"Finally, no suffering" sounds too cheesy
Call it a never-ending sleep,
Not the romantic kind, no fairytale could save me this
time
Pity on the front door, questions in the bathroom
No place for my corpse to rest in peace
Blurring reality with my cries
Shivers and chills down my spine
Were the normality of my life
Thin as paper and cold as ice
A bit of curiosity and a bit of misery
Are the things that I will leave behind
They will call it many names
Devil's easy prey, too weak from the start
Rumors and clouds will float above my house
Blood runs down the streets, red dyed stream
Just a cog in the clock, repetition clung to my bones
Words don't change meaning as often as lies
Suicide is still murder if the victim had no choice
Sadness is a symptom or a cause, tell me before I go
Bullying is a disease or a destiny, tell me before I go

The Blue Eyes and The Madman

By Mansi Sachdeva



I hope I am wearing a lens through which I see you now.
The colour of your little round eyes, as bright as blue and
as blue as the brightness in them,
like the tinged amber sky, that the clouds so insecure of
their hollow and bleached skin, try to hide,
your eyes, old, yet more handsome than ever.
I see your tiny delicate eyelashes surrounded by the
lovely marks of your laughs that you would always
suppress.
My glare, not proud of what it holds, lingers on those
traces, almost wanting to own them.

Just as I step into the portal where the years pass by in a
flash, I stand as perplexed as I am overwhelmed as I see
the round eyes again.
They are a lot younger, but they are yours.
However, they seem a little warm with hints of green,
I wonder what difference they speak of or if I like the
difference that I cannot help but see.
It speaks of summer to me.

The eyelashes are tiny and the same too.
But there are no neighbours for the eyes to look at,
for the residents to hold on to, to chit-chat over tea in the
evening,
to have lunches like the ladies or play around on the
picnics like the toddlers.
Oh, I do not like the difference at all.
These eyelashes are darker, thicker, and even longer,
separated from each other,
as they define the curves more exquisitely than ever.
But I still long for the traces I cannot fathom that I
cannot seem to find.

I walk to the right, thinking if they decided to find solace
somewhere else;
devastated, I pace to the left as I look through a
magnifying glass, this time thinking
if it is my eyes that have weakened or if the only sense of
relativity, I saw in you has faded away.
I return disappointed and look through the portal again,
convinced that what I see is a house of nobody.

Somebody lives there, secluded and by himself,
smashing the pans onto the stove as he tries to cook the
potatoes that wouldn't boil.

He shouts and screams, ravenous he is, but nobody
speaks a word to him.
So, he smashes the pans every day, breaking them as
they laugh at him, calling him a madman.
And then one day, the stove broke and did the gas leak,
choking him and laughing at whoever was: that is
everybody.

I screamed through the portal as I panted for air,
clenching my fists, for I bled tears of agony, and the pain
stabbed me.
The neighbours who laughed at his helplessness are
coughing their lungs out,
breathless, beating the grounds they lie on as they die
one by one, and the noise turns down.
Quiet and silent, just as they'd wanted.

The man smirked out of his victory and beat the pan
against the hard slap again.
Nobody laughed this time, but they did cry as they slept
tear-eyed.
The noise echoed around the town, a melody to my ears.
I wondered if the potatoes were cooked or if I should've
helped him.

As much as I wanted to help, I couldn't savvy why I
didn't step ahead.
When did I turn this cruel to sit and watch a town die
and call for no help?
The reality hits me as the neighbours lose the battle and
died altogether,
No police, no ambulance, no family, and absolutely
nobody come to grieve for them,
but there he stands, right behind the stove with a pan in
his hand.

I take a step back as the envision appears to be too close,
and finally, traumatised I am,
I pull up my hand towards my eyes to remove the lenses
I hope I am wearing,
only to look into the portal again and find the warmth of
the eyes staring back into mine.
I almost poke my eyes out as I try to get the lenses out
again and again.

ARTWORKS



AKRITI BALUNI



MANSI RAI



Department Events and Activities

13th September 2022 - A **General Body Meeting** was conducted and students were selected for the student council. They are serving as - Khushi Kr. Grover - President, Harshita Choudhary - Cultural Secretary, Shrutika - Treasurer, and Mansi Sachdeva, Ishika Baghel, Devyanshi Shekhawat, Ananya Kadambri Khanna, and Mansi Rai serving as Council Members.

23rd September 2022 - **Career Counselling Session: A Conversation** with **Ashutosh Bharadwaj**, Editor-at-large at Outlook on the topic 'Journalism Today: Opportunities and Challenges'

3rd November 2022 - The department conducted an **Orientation Program** to welcome first-year students.

22nd November 2022 - The department organised a **National Webinar** on 'Newborns: Genesis and Journey' by **Megha Ramaswamy**

23rd January 2022 - 1st February 2023 - Gyeoul, Photography Contest under **Avgaahan**, was conducted

27th February 2023 - **Dead Poets Society** organised a poetry meet on the theme " Hiraeth: Memories of Home"

15th March 2023 - A **Book Club** discussion on *The Truth About Me* by A. Revathi was organised

18th February 2023 - **Excursion** to the National Museum and Sunder Nursery

16th March 2023 - A talk on '**Road Safety by Design**' with **Dr. Matthew Varghese**.

5th April, 2023 - The Department organised **Ekphrasis**, its annual fest under which several events were conducted.

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