

**The Popular Gothic Novel**  
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**Week – 1 Lecture – 1C**  
**Introduction – Gothic Terror and Horror**

Hello, and welcome to this lecture on The Popular Gothic Novel. We are in week 1 and I am discussing some of the key concepts associated with this genre and in today's session we are going to talk about the differences between the Gothic Terror and Horror.

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Radcliffe: Terror and horror



- 'Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them'.

Source: Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry", New Monthly Magazine, vol. 16, 1826, pp. 149-150.



So, how does Ann Radcliffe perceive the difference between these two concepts of terror and horror? She says that, "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them." So, you can see how the one is very helpful to the soul and the other is detrimental to the wellbeing of the human soul.

So, one which is beneficial is apparently Gothic terror and horror does the opposite. So, in terms of Gothic terror it is supposed to kind of increase the human experience and it is supposed to turn the human imagination into something which can have an access to the higher degree of life and Gothic horror on the contrary is supposed to kind of confine human experience, it is supposed to

kind of freeze the human soul and in fact, nearly kind of destroy the good side of the human soul and being.

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### Mathew Lewis' *The Monk*



'the most shocking and gory of the early Gothic novels, *The Monk*. In Lewis's novel, the object of fear is ...a lustful monk who poses a very real danger to the characters in the story'.

Source: <https://www.thegothiclibrary.com/horror-vs-terror-and-the-gender-divide-in-gothic-literature/>



Now, we have an example of a Gothic horror in Mathew Lewis's *The Monk*. So this is supposed to be one of the most shocking and gory of the early Gothic novels and in fact, there is a lot of very graphic description of horrifying events in the narrative and we have a monk, a lustful monk as the central character who poses a very, very real danger to the characters in the story and this novel is a classic example of the different kind, the negative kind of Gothic narrative and it exemplifies Gothic horror because of its vivid description of brutality and that is supposed to be very, very harmful to the human soul.

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## Radcliffe: Terror and uncertainty



- 'She argues that terror is characterized by "obscurity" or indeterminacy in its treatment of potentially horrible events; it is this indeterminacy that leads the reader toward the Sublime. Horror, in contrast, "nearly annihilates" the reader's responsive capacity with its unambiguous displays of atrocity.'

• (Raskauskiene, 2009, p.21)



Now, Radcliffe offers further details about the nature of Gothic terror and the idea of uncertainty becomes embedded, becomes key to kind of exemplifying Gothic terror because things are kind of hinted at, there are a presentiments of certain kinds of danger but we do not exactly have very, very graphic descriptions such as the kind that we find in Lewis's *The Monk*.

So, Radcliffe is supposed to argue that a terror is characterized by obscurity or indeterminacy in its treatment of potentially horrible events; it is this indeterminacy that leads the reader toward the sublime. Horror, in contrast, "nearly annihilates" or destroys the reader's responsive capacity with its unambiguous displays of atrocity.

So, as I pointed out just now, it is obscurity, the hidden suggestiveness about the horror that has to come, the danger that has to come is key to Gothic terror and that kind of unknown, undefined element in Gothic terror is supposed to lead the reader to the higher idea of the sublime, which is supposed to awe the viewer or the reader and increase the imaginative landscape or the human imagination.

Whereas the utter description, the unambiguous, there is no doubt about what is happening in Gothic horror, the unambiguous display of atrocity, brutality, cruelty is something that will, as I pointed out earlier, eliminate the response of the empathetic capacity of the onlooker or the

viewer. So, this is a further element that is coded in Gothic terror which is this idea of obscurity and uncertainty which is what kind of drives this Gothic notion.

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## Radcliffe: Terror and Horror



- 'I apprehend, that neither Shakspeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?'

Source: Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry", *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 16, 1826, pp. 149-150.



Ann Radcliffe further argues that even great writers such as Shakespeare and Milton appreciated the element of terror and condemned horror because the former led to the higher experience for the human imagination. So, she says in her own words, "I apprehend, I understand that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where the lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity that accompany the first respecting the dreaded evil?"

So, she is very, very clear, here in pointing out and marking out the tradition of Gothic terror and she uses the example of Shakespeare and Milton, the great writers in British literature and she suggest that Shakespeare and Milton looked at horror as something not very useful for creating this feeling of the sublime in the reader as well as she points out to Mr. Burke, whom we kind of discussed in the previous lecture.

She suggest that even Burke does not think that horror is very useful to producing this emotion of the sublime in the reader and on the contrary terror is supposed to be a very, very useful in creating this element of the sublime, the useful, the sophisticated emotion of the sublime in the reader and she also mentions that everybody, Shakespeare, Milton and Burke, the three writers whom she is referring to here, all considered it to be highly beneficial to producing that one

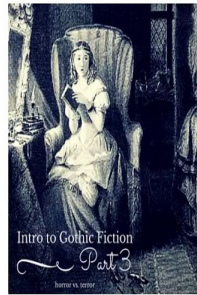
particular important emotion of the sublime that is supposed to expand the soul, increase the capacity for response on the part of the human reader or viewer.

And she once again kind of clarifies and suggest that terror is underlined by uncertainty and obscurity with regard to the dreaded evil, so there is evil in the text but that is not kind of spelt out or described in great detail and there is a lot of uncertainty and obscurity in relation to this dreaded evil and that and therein lies the terror for the reader.

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## Writing of Terror

'Radcliffe herself has come to epitomise the writing of 'terror' in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, despite the fact that her fiction seems to use the two terms interchangeably.'



Source: Dale Townshend, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ann-radcliffe>  
Image Source: <https://crimsonkas.wordpress.com/tag/anne-radcliffe/>



So, Ann Radcliffe comes to kind of embody the notion of terror in the late 18th and 19th century and even though there is a perception that she has somehow used both these terms interchangeably, terror and horror were used interchangeably but she did not go into graphic description that is associated with the Gothic horror, so that is something we need to remember even though the terms were used interchangeably to refer to Gothic terror in her works. So, she also is responsible for starting this school of Radcliffe.

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## Terror versus Horror; Radcliffe versus Lewis



- 'the ghastly, lurid excesses of a fiction such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk: A Romance* (1796).
- Radcliffean narratives [influenced by] Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) [emphasize] psychological suspense over bodily gore'

Source: Dale Townshend, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ann-radcliffe>  
Image source: <https://www.thegothiclibrary.com/horror-vs-terror-and-the-gender-divide-in-gothic-literature/>



Now, further differentiation between terror and horror, Radcliffe versus Lewis, so you see, you can see the image of Radcliffe on the left and Matthew Lewis on the right and we need to kind of understand that *The Monk: A Romance*, which was published in 1796 is defined by its ghastly nature, with its excesses in terms of the elements of evil.

So it comes to kind of embody the really gory side of Gothic fiction and Radcliffe on the other hand was influenced to a great extent by Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. And she kind of put a lot of emphasis on psychological suspense over bodily gore, so she was not very much into descriptions of bodily harm which we can come across in the monk.

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## Radcliffe's Terror and Uncertainty



- 'by an omnipresent sense of mystery and obscurity over the certainties of fast-paced action,
- and by mere hints and suggestions of ghostly activity over fully realised manifestations of the supernatural'

Source: Dale Townshend, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-anthradcliffe>  
Image source: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/Travel/Presentations/Udolpho.htm>



So, what is being emphasized in Radcliffe's terror is an omnipresent, an ever present sense of mystery, so mystery makes the readers as well as the characters in the narrative curious and what is also very much present is this idea of obscurity mark. What is obscurity? Obscurity is nothing but the lack of clarity in terms of content, in terms of the nature of evil, in terms of the nature of the plot and these are more important to Radcliffe over the certainty of fast-paced event moving one after the other to its teleology.

So, what we do get at Radcliffe's terror are hints and suggestions or kind of supernatural stuff, ghostly activities, brutal activity, instead of fully realized orchestrations, manifestations, illustrations of this supernatural. So, there are hints of the supernatural, but not illustration of it in Radcliffe's terror and we also know that in Radcliffe's fiction everything is neatly explained by reason, so rationality is triumphant at the end of the novel.

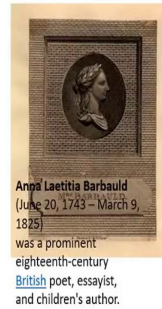


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## Objects of Terror: Uncertainty

- In her essay *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*, Ann Laetitia Aikin (later known as Mrs. Barbauld) had set out to explore a "paradox of the heart":  
"the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror."

Source: (Raškauskienė, 2009, p.17)



Okay, we need to look at other figures who have talked about objects of terror and I am picking up the example of Mrs. Barbauld whose names is Anna Laetitia Aikin, she is popularly known as Mrs. Barbauld and she was a very prominent 18th century British poet, essayist and writer of children's fiction. So in her essay on the *Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*, Anna Laetitia Aikin kind of explores the paradox of the heart, the contradiction that we can find in the heart of the reader which delights in objects of pure terror.

That is what she says, "The apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror." Even though the terror is there, we have come to kind of derive pleasure and delight from such objects of terror. And that idea of terror is important, the narrative functioning of Gothic fiction.

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## Aesthetic Terror and Uncertainty



'Aikin argues that the agony of "suspense," the "irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity," is more painful than the emotional discomfort of observing events transpire, with the result that we avidly dwell upon objects of pure terror "rather than turn away, wondering"'

Source: (Raškauskienė, 2009, p.17)



Aikin's ideas of aesthetic terror and uncertainty is useful to understanding the mechanisms of Gothic narratives, what makes the Gothic narrative tick? Because we also need to remember constantly that these Gothic narratives were immensely popular towards the end of the 18th century and well into the 19th and 20th century, if that fiction was very powerfully written, it continues to be popular.

And Aikin's ideas are useful to understanding the nature of Gothic narrative and the moods in which it functions so effectively. So she argues that the agony of suspense, the agony of suspense, the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity, on the part of the reader, so the suspense and the curiosity on the part of the reader is more painful, is unbearable than the emotional discomfort of observing events transpire, with the result that we avidly dwell upon objects of pure terror rather than turn away wondering.

So, you know the emotional discomfort, that we undergo, that we experience is greater in Gothic fiction because the suspense is greater and that suspense is what kind of draws the readers in and that is what Gothic fiction have to offer for the readers, so she says that if we kind of watch events happen one after the other and say for example, domestic fiction, that is not a great draw in comparison to the pull of the Gothic terror narratives.

So, we cannot look away, we cannot look away from these objects of terror and Gothic fiction becomes objects of terror in themselves, that is what they are objects which kind of tempt the reader to keep looking and not kind of wander away from it.

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## Gothic Motif: Doubt and Uncertainty



- 'It seeks to create in our minds the possibility that there may be things beyond human power, reason and knowledge. But that possibility is constantly accompanied by uncertainty. In Radcliffe's work, even the most terrifying things turn out to have rational, non-supernatural explanations; by contrast, in Lewis's *The Monk*, Satan himself appears.'

Source: John Bowen, Gothic Motifs, <https://www.bl.uk/romantic-and-victorians/articles/gothic-motifs>



Further ideas about doubt and uncertainty which are coded in Gothic fiction and we understand that in Gothic fiction there are elements and happenings which are beyond human power, reason and knowledge. So, that is what Gothic fiction seems to teach both the readers as well as the characters that there may be things in human life which cannot be controlled by human power, which cannot be explained away by human reason and which cannot be kind of neatly understood, categorized, and recorded by human knowledge.

And we need to understand that if we cannot kind of control it, record it, categorize it then there is uncertainty in the world. There is a certain element of indeterminacy in the world and Gothic fiction becomes a symbol for that kind of doubt and uncertainty. In Radcliffe's work, even the most terrifying things turn out to have rational, non-supernatural explanations whereas in works such as *The Monk*, Satan himself appears. Therefore, there is a kind of reinforcement of certain kinds of knowledge, certain kinds of understandings about the spirit world in Gothic fiction such as Mathew Lewis's *The Monk*.

So, we need to kind of understand that there is both doubt and uncertainty but there is also affirmation in Gothic motif, so it is a very, very interesting narrative because of the different approaches to life itself, in a symbolic way, while on the one hand reason is upheld, reason is kind of advertised as the most certain thing in the world, on the other hand we have quite the opposite being triumphant in Gothic narratives as well. So it ultimately becomes kind of an exposition into the different ways of looking, understanding and experiencing the world.

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### Gothic Motif: Doubt and Uncertainty



- 'The uncertainty that goes with Gothic is very characteristic of a world in which orthodox religious belief is waning;
- there is both an exaggerated interest in the supernatural and the constant possibility that even very astonishing things will turn out to be explicable.'

Source: John Bowen, Gothic Motif, <https://www.ll.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gothic-motif/> Image Source: <http://www.infoway24.com/178/18th-century-english-literature-gothic-novel.htm>



Okay, the Gothic is supposed to be very characteristic therefore, of a world in which orthodox, conventional, traditional religious belief is waning, lessening, but at the same time, as I pointed out there is also a strengthening of that kind of orthodox religious belief because there are, at this kind of Gothic narrative also prompts, creates, produces an exaggerated interest in the supernatural and there is also a constant possibility.

On the one hand that these astonishing things will turn out to be kind of explained in a reasonable way according to logic and reason but also the possibility that the other side can also turnout to be true. So, there is doubt and uncertainty but there is also certainty in the offering, so there are two pathways into which the Gothic narratives can go into.

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## The Aim of Gothic Fiction?



- 'The Gothic novel should be seen as attempting to evoke a particularized response, and its stock devices as merely one means to that end.'

Source: (KEECH, 1974, p.131)

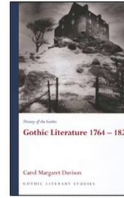


So, what is the aim of Gothic fiction ultimately? So what is the purpose to do? It purposes to do something very, very simple which is that evoke, a particular response from the reader and what is that particular response, it is trying to use its stock devices, we have seen what those stock devices are, over the course of these introductory lectures we know what the devices are, an evil, a villain, a castle, the ideas of imprisonment, snatching of property and all kinds of harassment inflicted on the vulnerable and what do these kind of devices attempt to do ultimately. It attempts to kind of evoke fear on the part of the reader.

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## The Aim of Gothic Fiction?

- 'The response of the Gothic novel is fear, universally inherent in every man's nature, primitive and basic,
- and existing regardless of time, place, or culture'.



Source: (KEECH, 1974, p.131)

Image Source: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucyo/books/book/distributed/t/tvo#338095.html>



So, the response of the Gothic novel is fear and that fear is something that everybody can kind of produce, everybody is capable of fear, it is in man's nature, it is a primitive quality, the very basic quality and that fear exists regardless of time, across time, since man was born and across places, across countries and culture. So, Gothic fiction is very, very appealing because it just appeals to a very primitive basic emotion on the human mind.

And therefore, it continues to be successful because all these stock devices, sometimes we can also call it formulaic elements, have this one purpose in mind. So the really very Formulaic novels, the not-so-well written Gothic novels, can also attempt to kind of evoke a fear in a very basic way whereas the very well written, sophisticated Gothic fiction can also evoke fear and also make the reader think in about different ways of seeing life and society.

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## The Nature of Fear in the Gothic

- 'The acts that create fear and presage ...are grievous sins, not mere wrongs the worst of what man or devil is capable.
- not from accident or simple human frailty or corruption,
- From an agency evaluated by the reader's moral perspective as approaching the ultimate in evil.'

• Source: (Wech, 1974, p. 133)  
• Image Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1031/the-gothic-and-the-origins-of-gothic-literature/>



So what is the nature of fear in the Gothic novels, so what are all the things that the characters in the novel are frightened about, so the acts, the acts, the events in the novel that create fear for the characters are grievous sins, not ordinary crimes, we are not talking about simple thievery, a very, very simple crimes but we are talking about serious wrongs, massive crimes, crimes against humanity, that the worst of man or devil is capable of.

So, that is what makes the Gothic really kind of a visceral narrative, a horrifying kind of fiction, so it can be represented in two ways, it can be represented in a terrifying manner, it can be represented in a horrifying manner, but the danger is there, the danger, the wrongs are there and as I pointed out, all these elements of fears did not arise from simple accidents in human action or simple human frailties or corruption.

But they arise from an agency which can be categorized as the ultimate evil that the human is capable of, so it kind of reaches the moral compass of the reader, well and the reader knows that this is not a simple vice, it is not a very simple, ordinary frailty but it is a, it is the dreaded evil itself and that the human is capable of inflicting on the other. Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.