

How to Cite:

Abedini, S. (2022). Horror and gothic literature, same or separate: A comparative study. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 7072–7078.

<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS2.6689>

Horror and gothic literature, same or separate: A comparative study

Dr Sirous Abedini

Ph.D in Linguistics, Gelisim University, Istanbul, Turkey

Corresponding author email: sabedini@gelisim.edu.tr

Abstract---This study aims to show the readers who are drawn to this subject and the ones who are questioning if the two kinds of literature that have been mentioned are in the same category or fully separated from each other, that these kinds of literature are actually in the same category and one of them is other one's subgenre. Research focuses on the ideas of people who talked about the subject itself, the psychology that is needed to understand the horror and gothic in order to follow the literature of it better so person reading can be capable to interpret it more comfortable.

Keywords---gothic literature, horror literature, novels, psychology, subgenre, genre, horror, scenery, characters, differences, similarities.

Introduction

Gothic and horror, rather close yet so far from each other. Gothic is shown to be a category of horror, which is considered a part of it but people like changing and trying to go on with new ways, therefore as they do, people started to argue over gothic being part of horror literature and they started talking and writing about it. Although these words share the almost same meaning and categories subjects themselves are quite familiar to each other, they seem to be getting parted in literature because of their differences and specific ways to tell a story nowadays by people. Gothic, from a literary aspect, is a style of writing which contains the elements of fear, death, romance, and gloomy scenery. The word goth, on the other hand, It's origins comes from French gothique or Latin Gothicus. It was used in the meaning of “not classical” and to define the architecture that did not fit in with the traditional style of medieval architecture in the 17th and 18th centuries. On the other hand, horror in the dictionary is described as “an intense feeling of fear, shock, or disgust.” and from a literary view, that is exactly what it implies too unlike the goth.

The word horror's origins come from French as it did with goth, Orror meaning “to shudder or to bristle.” Gothic novels ordinarily contain old and abandoned

castles, extreme spectacles similar to misty forests, rainy and stormy weathers, curses, omens, visions, and religious aspects. Gothic novels focus on the mind and the way it haunts a person, being isolated and emotions with the sense of horror in it. Gothic Novels pushes you to scare yourself and sympathize with the characters. The personas of Gothic fiction are usually similar, a protagonist is often a man that is bold, witty, self-sacrificial and most likely to be the one that saves the virgin young lady who is sensitive, pure and delicate that is usually imprisoned, abused and left weak. The villain is often a priest or a king, they are most likely to be the most complex persona in the story and is sympathetic at the start of the novel because of their deceptive nature. Horror novels are usually more focused on the mystery and the unexpected events that may or may not contain supernatural elements. The way it portrays the scenery is very correlative to gothic horror since they are related very closely but the events are more physical and horror novels push the reader to get scared from the events itself. While the plots in the gothic novels show the same type of energy, in horror it is hard to tell that there's a significant way of choosing a plot or writing. Personas in horror novels are so much more unique, unlike gothic novels personas in horror show more variety but it seems that most of them have the instinct to follow, go after a voice or get themselves in dangerous situations just to keep the fright going. In other words, horror characters don't have a particular type but they do have a common trait and that trait shows gothic novels follow more of a way to scare you with thoughts while the horror scares you with psychical action.

Literature Review

Gothic Literature and Novels

Gothic Literature was introduced to the literature world as a new genre within the help of Horace Walpole who has written *The Castle of Otranto* and published it in 1764 calling it a Gothic story as a sophisticated joke which led the foundations to start a whole new genre (Invaluable,2019). Following his success and getting inspired by him, Ann Radcliffe wrote her most well-known story *The Mysteries Of Udolpho* (1794) which she categorized as a romance since Gothic wasn't that popular back then. This unpopularity lasted until a publishing house named Minerva Press founded by William Lane who is a bookseller in 1780 brought attention to Gothic Literature by publishing a huge amount of Gothic novels which was written mostly by women (Julia , 2018). After Radcliffe and Walpole and with the help of Minerva Press, the gothic literature earned its place in literature for real undeniably and lots of novels followed in their footsteps, it spread like a wildfire in the victorian era and the late 18th century. It gained full attraction with novels like *The Monk; A Romance* by Matthew Gregory Lewis (1796), *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818), *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo (1831 in French), *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens (1853), *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897) (Kennedy,2019).

The gothic literature itself focuses on the emotional horror, its main priority is to make the reader go through an emotional ride and make it in a tense direction. Often it pushes the reader to think and get scared from their minds. (Floyd,2019). It can be also called Gothic Romance, not to be fooled by the name romance, it is

not like the romance books that have lovers kissing and hugging, the name comes from Romantic Literature. (Kennedy,2019). Emotions focused on the Gothic Literature are intense like Romantic literature. Characters tend to swoon, they are strong-willed and they will do anything to pursue their goals (Garcia,2013). Gothic Novels follow some specific characteristics that mark the aforementioned literature and gothic novels. Certain characteristics shows particular settings, scenery, characters, the place that it takes place on and the plot it has been written about. For example, gothic novels highly rely on dark, mystic, foggy scenery and even the protagonist is typical but even with all of the common elements, how do you understand if a novel is particularly gothic or not? A reader can easily identify gothic fiction by searching for a heroine that faints a lot due to an emotional case, haunted or cursed houses, castles, mysterious scenery, monsters, supernatural creatures, bad weather conditions, people talking extremely fancy, curses and omens, sexuality and desire, scary rich or catholic people. As a more specific way to understand if a novel is a gothic story, looking for a villain, a scary ruler with terrifying eyes. For instance, Montoni from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is described as "The fire and keenness of his eye, its proud exaltation" in the novel and for further example Melmoth, the Wanderer is portrayed as "I had never beheld such eyes blazing in a mortal face." in the book written by Charles Maturin in 1820 (Vasiliev and Frost,2014).

Horror Novels and Horror Literature

Horror literature is a part of a genre which is called speculative fiction. Speculative fiction is a wide genre that includes events and creatures that fundamentally do not exist in the real world. J.A.Cuddon's description of horror explains the whole horror genre perfectly, "a piece of fiction in prose of variable length... which shocks, or even frightens the reader, or perhaps induces a feeling of repulsion or loathing.". Horror literature as Cuddon states aims to create a horrifying event to scare the reader, follow the plot within that event and disgust people (Wikipedia). The history of Horror Literature dates back to Ancient Greece and Rome. It is safe to say that the Ancient Greeks' and Ancient Romans' works influenced the horror of today and past. In the 18th century, Romanticism and Gothic Literature developed and Horror became even more significant and vital. In the 19th century, Gothic Literature horror grew even more popular and became the Horror Literature we know today and the 20th century was the blast of horror writing. Cinema also got affected by this genre highly especially in the 20th century (Wikipedia). In 1235, the time when the Vatican wanted to reestablish orthodoxy of the faith. They started to charge people and hang people claiming that they were witches and heretics. This resulted in people to be terrified of such things and write about it as humankind do (Masters, 2013). Horror Literature themes contained death, demons, evil spirits, afterlife and witchcraft since it has roots from culture, religion, and things that have bothered humans throughout history (Literary Terms).

The Horror Literature mutates and develops throughout history and time, new genres are born and separated, as Howard Phillips Lovecraft said: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." (Wasserstein,2017). The elements and characteristics that define a horror novel are simple. Horror novels usually start with events that

seem ordinary and then progress to have supernatural causes. Characters are people that we can emphasize and identify with even though they are haunted by some supernatural events. Lives usually depend on the main character and his success in defeating the monster or solving the supernatural incident. The mood of the novels is usually dark, and if the story takes place in one particular location, that location is likely to be described in detail. The writing style is pretty plain and they are usually written in the third person. Even though the plot is different for each book, it contains surprising and terrifying events and since the purpose of the horror novels is to scare, terrify and trigger the feeling of disgust in the reader horror highly relies on violence, gore, bloody graphics, and to provoke those feelings setting is very vital. The atmosphere must be threatening, for the novel to scare the reader it's a must to pay attention to details because it's what pulls the reader into the situation and feel the emotions the character feels. Sometimes it can be even more important than the characters and the plot itself (Robinson,2011) Here are some examples of horror novels that caught every element of the horror literature nearly perfect, the scariest books that have ever written, *Dracula* By Bram Stoker (1897) which is a Gothic novel too, *Haunting Of Hill House* By Shirley Jackson (1959), *Hell House* by Richard Matheson (1971), *The Exorcist* By William Peter Blatty (1971), *Pet Sematary* by Stephen King (1983), *The Silence Of The Lambs* By Thomas Harris (1988), *Blindness* By José Saramago (1995).

Conclusion

From all the information and opinions gathered by the research that has been done for this study, it is clear to see that Gothic literature and Horror literature have their differences, but it doesn't mean that they shall be put in different categories, because gothic literature evolved through the horror culture and their subjects are fairly close. Hence why it is safe to say that Gothic literature is a subgenre of horror literature and is listed under horror literature by many sites that have been researched. The gothic genre itself is created by the combination of death, love, and horror while the horror genre consists of all and focuses on so much more which makes it one of the widest genres. That is why gothic literature is considered a subgenre of horror literature as well as supernatural horror, nonsupernatural horror and more. All of this doesn't mean that you can call a gothic book just a horror book the reason being the thoughts of people when they are buying a book. If a person calls a book horror that carries gothic literature's characteristics people will think of the other genres that horror consists of. Thinking of horror literature as a pool of subjects and unique combinations of gore and uneasy feelings, some people might want to swim on the deeper side where it focuses on the getting scared by psychologic problems while the others might want to swim on the more shallow part of the pool where it focuses on the blood and horrifying sceneries.

That is the reason why it is important to know the subgenre of the book. Horror literature itself is a quite wide genre that changes and evolves a lot through time, it is like an alive being, improving and growing to this time and leaving behind great pieces created by humankind. People decide what they want and need to write about depending on their feelings and the time they are experiencing the life on meaning that literature will change, the subjects will vary and this will create

new genres and also subgenres. Horror literature is created by the people experiencing exorcisms, old legends, what priests told people in order to keep them under control like calling people witches to hang or burn them, black magic and people's extensive imagination, Gothic literature is created using these and also romance and overflowing emotions because the period it rose and became celebrated had a huge transatlantic literary movement starting called romanticism. Romanticism was an artistic movement that highly relied on feelings and imagination and Romanticism writers liked writing especially about nature, death, love like in the Gothic Literature. It is readily apparent to see that the literature and movement influenced each other since their timestamps are so close to each other. Romanticism took place in the time period of the 1800s to 1850s and Gothic Literature started getting popular in 1764 with Horace Walpole's legendary novel *The Castle of Otranto*.

Since gothic literature is the only subgenre of horror that highly concentrates on emotions and love, it is very simple to differ it from the other subgenres because most of them focus on more common concepts like violent scenery, monsters, gore, therefore, Gothic Literature is one of the reasons that horror became successful and known by people because of how unique and breathtakingly emotional it is compared to the other subgenres of horror. Taking Horror Literature as a blank canvas, Gothic literature painted most of it so other subgenres of horror can use the base and keep creating and adding new elements to the piece. Most of the time, the author will use and mix up lots of genres together to create something new and exciting for the reader. For example, using vampires as a gore element and making them the monsters that split people's throats with their sharp horrifying teeth, red eyes that light up the dark and drink blood violently instead of portraying them as a romantic element in the novel which kidnaps a helpless, pathetic girl that he desires and tries to make them the love of their life shows the use of the details furnished by Gothic Literature in horror and gore. With that being said, Gothic Literature being the Horror authors favorite subgenre to write in at the past, nowadays authors focus on the violent side of horror in order to be able to connect with the teenagers and the new generation that asks for more blood and terrifying elements in the book and the reason of it is the new horror movies coming out at the cinema theaters, people started liking to see things familiar to it. So Horror authors evolved as literature evolves and one of the most popular authors of present time Stephen King is a perfect example of it. He has so many books that showcase horror of the modernday that people adore and have been made into movies. The most popular examples of it are *IT*, *Skeleton Crew*, *Doctor Sleep*.

People read books to escape from reality. "I suffer from life and from other people. I can't look at reality face to face. Even the sun discourages and depresses me. Only at night and all alone, withdrawn, forgotten and lost, with no connection to anything real or useful only then do I find myself and feel comforted." As Fernando Pessoa, stated in *The Book of Disquiet* puts it under the lights how desperate people are to feel something unreal and how they feel comfortable. Taking these odds to recognition somebody reading and trying to understand, someone who expects unbelievable, horrifying creatures in horror literature can find themselves in a horrifying situation where the story leaves them in a loop where they'd have to consider reading it if the book in their hands is a gothic one

but if the odds are in their favor they'd be reading Dracula and enjoying it since it has a supernatural character as well as events that terrifies the reader truly with scenery. Taking all of these into consideration tag of the literature of the book is extremely important and saying that it is just a horror story, people would expect differently from the book on behalf of readers understanding differently and not having enough knowledge to understand that horror also contains emotional roller coasters. The reason this has been explained is to show that Horror Literature surely contains Gothic Literature but it is a very unique part of it that some people are not aware of. Literature, a magnificent way of telling ideas, stories, of self-expression. Art of thinking and transmitting it to the paper with words of mind.

So many ways and subjects to discuss for people to keep themselves entertained and getting swallowed to a new world of imagination. Some people choose a romantic way to go, they seek for love, some people choose adventure because they wanna go far and run away from the world they know and some people choose horror cause they want to see something unreal, something to be terrified more than the real world they live in. So what happens when plenty of people feel the same way and wanna write about the same feelings and subjects? After all, there are 7 billion on the Earth and they keep producing new things such as books, paintings and more and of course they will simply clash or have very similar opinions. With those similar opinions, people will create new genres of Literature and even in it, they will clash and create subgenres of Literature. Horror Literature was created by the people that wanted terrify people and show them a new way to understand fears and from that Gothic Literature was born by the people who were scared from feelings and mind more than the other things horror ordinarily portrays.

References

- Bowen, (15 May 2014), Retrived October 16th, 2019, from <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-andvictorians/themes/the-gothic>
- Gothic Novels: Characteristics & Examples. (2015, May 29). Retrived 15th,2019, from <https://study.com>
- Pagan, (October 18, 2018), Retrived October 16th, 2019, from <https://www.nypl.org>
- Kennedy, (2019). Retrived October 15th, 2019, from <https://www.thoughtco.com>
- Greaver and Wilkerson, (n.d.). Retrived October 15th, 2019, from <https://study.com>
- G.Floyd (2019), Retrived October 15th,2019, from <https://www.quora.com>
- Smith, (2018), Retrived October 15th,2019, from <https://www.quora.com>
- Dinnen, (2018), Retrived October 15th,2019, from <https://www.quora.com>
- Sampaolo, et al., (2015), Retrived October 16th,2019, from <https://www.britannica.com>
- Sartori (2018), Retrived October 16th, 2019, from <https://bookriot.com>
- Harris (2015), Retrived October 16th, 2019, from <https://www.virtualsalt.com>
- Frost,Vasiliev (2014), Retrived October 25th, 2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com>
- O'Connor-Fenton (2019), Retrived October 25th,2019, from <http://blog.bridgemanimages.com>

Angelis (2018), Retrived October 25th, 2019, from <https://blog.homeforfiction.com>

Cormier (2010), Retrived October 25th, from <https://prezi.com>

Stine (2019), Retrived October 26th, <https://www.masterclass.com>

Wassertein (2017), Retrived October 26th, <http://thecircular.org>

Foxe,Staff (2018),Retrived October 27th, <https://www.pastemagazine.com>

Chopra, et al. (2009), Retrived October 27th, <https://www.britannica.com>