

The Fusion of Gothicism and Romanticism

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There are numerous literary movements, and each one is unique and insightful in their own manner. Naturalism, Postmodernism, and Romanticism are examples of such movements that are not only aesthetically distinct, but also fundamentally different in their core values. Each of these movements were formed in response to each other. Where Romanticism promotes the concepts of nature, human's relationship with each other and nature, the sublime and the supernatural, Naturalism is focused more on the reality of human suffering and determinism. Some narrative examples of Naturalism include Stephen Crane's *Maggie; Girl of the Streets* or Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. Postmodernism, contrarily, "...maintains that frameworks and systems, for example the structuralist systems explained in the structuralist area, are merely fictitious constructs and that they cannot be trusted to develop meaning or to give order...[as] there exists no unified truth" (Allen J., et al.).

Not all literary movements are so divergent in their ideologies however. While there are a great many distinctions between literary movements, especially with the aforementioned ones That does not necessarily mean that there are no similarities to be found in all literary movements. Oftentimes, works and authors found in many movements do not adhere to a specific timeline; instead, multiple movements can lay claim to a specific author or work as a representative of that particular school of thought. The Romantic and Gothic movements are two such examples that help to illustrate the fusion of ideologies, aesthetics, and even in some cases, authors. The Romantic movement, as previously mentioned, focused on nature, humanity's relationship with nature and each other, the supernatural, and the sublime. The Gothic movement, on the other hand, "... came to designate the macabre, mysterious, fantastic, supernatural, and, again, the terrifying, especially the *pleasurably* terrifying..." ("The Gothic: Overview"). While at first glance both movements appear distinct, in reality they share many of

the same qualities, particularly in regards to the elaborate depiction of the supernatural and nature. Due to the tightly interwoven nature of the Gothic and the Romantic, it is even possible to interpret them as two parts of a whole.

In order better appreciate how both movements intersect with each other, it is imperative that their ideologies are properly defined and representative works help to depict their literary fundamentals. For that purpose, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, and *Mansfield Park* will be utilized in order to illustrate the differences and similarities between the Romantic and the Gothic, while Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" will be used in order to depict how one work depicts a fusion of both movements.

Despite the initial inclination, the term Gothic is not so easy to define, especially in today's age. This could be because of the broad influence and evolution of the genre from classic novels like *Jane Eyre* to the more modern thoughts where the term is often equated with vampires and ghosts. Regardless, "Gothic is a complex cultural, term and its meanings have varied greatly across the 400 years of its persistence...its visions of the past were frequently displacements of the present, and its depictions of superstition embodied the tensions of an age supposedly rendered ordered..." (Hughes 1). The term originated from a group of Germanic warrior tribesmen who gained power after the fall of Rome. Later it was also applied to a form of architecture and literary movement. Each of these concepts offer a prism of truth to the term Gothic, and makes the exact definition nebulous. This aspect is further referenced in Michael Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*:

"...Both the generic multiplicity of the Gothic and what one might call its discursive primacy, effectively detach the Gothic from the tidy simplicity of thinking it as so many

predictable, fictional conventions. This may end up making “Gothic” a more ambiguous, shifting term...” (Gamer 9).

Despite the fluidity of the term and the style, the importance of the Gothic genre can still be felt today as can be seen from the popularity of authors (like Stephen King) and vampire narratives, (like *Interview with the Vampire*). Given the expansive scope and evolution of the movement, this paper will concentrate on the Gothic movement that arose after and during the 1700-1800’s.

In a modern sense, the Gothic tends to relate to horror and suspense, however, this is only the tip of the iceberg. The term “Gothic” was coined in a literary sense in 1765 with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*; though it wasn’t until the latter portions of the eighteenth century that the Gothic movement began in earnest and gained notable traction in Victorian literature. These dates coincide with the dates of the Romantic Literary era, which was potent during the 1800’s; the close proximity in dates could help explain why both movements are so heavily intertwined with each other. Gothic elements of setting description and narrative detail can even be seen in Romantic works such as John Keats’ “The Eve of St. Agnes” and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Christabel” (“The Gothic: Overview”). While the Gothic does address the macabre and terror, it is imperative to note that the elements of nature and the supernatural are just as vital to the genre as the aspects of horror.

The strong correlation between nature and the sublime has always been potent and tightly interwoven, even in Romantic literature. This interrelationship can also be seen in the Gothic portrayal of nature and the sublime. As professor John Bowen notes, the sublime and nature are “...often terrifying and awesome and overwhelming and Gothic is absolutely at the centre of that move to the sublime and sublimity in understanding the world” (Bowen). This sense of the terrifying, overwhelming, and the awesome are translated into the environments of the Gothic

atmosphere, thus helping to create a sense of primal perturbation. Unlike Romanticism, the portrayal of nature is not often as benign in Gothic literature. There is still an element of wonder and power when the environment is described, but there is also a sharp edge of danger, darkness, and primal forces. Nature helps to convey this particular sort of mood and the aesthetics of the Gothic style. Professor Bowen expounds upon that concept, stating that, “Gothic fiction is fascinated by strange places. On the one hand, very wild and remote landscapes, and on the other, to very imprisoning places” (Bowen). This wild aspect of nature is often seen in the description of raging storms, wild seas, and dark, foreboding mountains. The mere sense of solitude found in such natural settings also weigh heavily upon both characters and readers, especially when they are confronted with the supernatural.

The impact of nature has a profound influence on the representation of the supernatural in Gothic literature. The natural environment helps to heighten the sense and foreboding of the supernatural. While there are a great many elements that help to compose the framework of the Gothic, this supernatural aspect is especially vital for the genre. These supernatural elements are oftentimes represented by ghosts, demons, or vampires. The use of these figures is two-fold. Not only does it help convey a sense of terror, but it also helps to depict the anachronism element that is a staple of the Gothic. The past and the modern are often heavily considered in the Gothic and are represented by supernatural figures that occupy both spaces of time. These supernatural elements offer “[d]iscrepancies between registers, ‘ancient’ versus ‘modern’...The Gothic reinforces the distance between its figures and their possible points of reference to that point...” (Faflak 201). Thus, the supernatural element, even if there is a naturalistic explanation for the events, depict a fusion of the past and present. The most profound of these elements is the depiction of the ghost in the Gothic genre, “[t]he thing that you think is dead but comes back

vividly alive in the present” (Bowen). The added weight of the juxtaposition of the past and the modern, in addition, to providing a sense of foreboding make the characteristics of the supernatural especially vital in its representation in the Gothic. Professor Bowen observes that there are two types of supernatural representation in Gothic literature. He states that the, “Gothic is fascinated by the supernatural... So, there are two different kinds of Gothic – one that uses the supernatural, as it were, and expects us to believe in it – and the other that gives a natural or realistic explanation of it” (Bowen).

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* helps to depict these Gothic elements. While often thought as satirizing the genre, *Northanger Abbey* does represent traditional Gothic elements in an ideal fashion. This, of course, extends to the depiction of nature and the setting, as well as the supernatural, or rather the lack of the supernatural. As noted by John Mullan, “... Catherine Morland, imposes on reality the Gothic plots with which she is familiar... Yet she had made a discovery: ‘gothic’ truly came alive in the thoughts and anxieties of her characters. Gothic has always been more about fear of the supernatural than the supernatural itself” (Mullan). Even without the aid of supernatural, the Gothic elements of *Northanger Abbey* are still potent.

While the supernatural in *Northanger Abbey* does not exist in the fashion of ghosts or ghouls, the descriptions found in the novel are still indicative of a haunting atmosphere. The most illustrative of these portrayals can be seen when Catherine Morland arrives at Northanger Abbey. Her own preconceptions of the place color her observations of the environment:

“As they drew near the end of their journey, her impatience for a sight of the abbey... returned in full force, and every bend in the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing in beautiful splendor on its high Gothic windows. But so

low did the building stand, that she found herself passing through the great gates of the lodge...a sudden scud of rain driving full in her face made it impossible for her to observe any further..." (Austen 151).

The description above grants the estate a haunting atmosphere that helps to intensify the protagonist's suspicions about General Tinley. By placing a special emphasis on the ancient oaks, the passage helps to ignite a feeling of history and nostalgia, in addition to something that is untamed and feral. At the same time, the beauty placed upon the setting sun helps to convey a feeling of elegance and wonder; however, this serenity is quickly replaced with foreboding as the rain forces Catherine to cease further observation. Thus, the depiction of this stately gray manor, surrounded by ancient oaks and rain, helps to enforce the vision of nature as being solitary, and oppressive that is often found within the Gothic. Catherine's own initial prejudice against the General and the influence from the environment's ambience also impacts her observations when describing the inside of the house as evidenced by the following quote, "...one moment's suspicion of any past scenes of horror being acted within the solemn edifice. The breeze had not seemed to waft the sight of the murdered to her; it had wafted nothing worse than a thick mizzling rain" (Austen 151). The fact that the way that nature is described here is not indicative of past, macabre events makes Catherine confused, as she no doubt thought that such an event would leave a permanent scar upon nature and the Abbey.

Unlike Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" does have a significant supernatural presence and the elements of nature are exceptionally potent. While Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" does fall under the Romantic movement, these supernatural and natural aspects are also indicative of the Gothic movement; the most evident of these concepts is the fact that the entire poem is essentially a ghost story. As

noted by the Norton's overview of the Gothic, "[m]ore pervasive signs of Gothic influence show up in some of the most frequently read Romantic poems — for example, the account of the skeleton ship and the crew's reaction ("A flash of joy . . . And horror follows") in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" ("The Gothic: Overview"). These supernatural occurrences, especially in regards to the terrifying constructs of Death and Torment, are both concepts that exist in the past and the present. As the crewmembers die, and then rise again towards the end of the poem, it demonstrates a sort of existence that is above time; as though they are no longer affected by mortality. In a way, their fickle existence also is indicative of the crewmembers' fickle nature, as at first they were outraged by the Mariner shooting the albatross, then accepting of it, and then enraged once more. What is interesting about this poem is how the supernatural and nature are conjoined, since the supernatural occurrences are the result of nature avenging itself against the Mariner for shooting the albatross.

Nature itself shows its full might within the poem and helps to intensify the atmosphere and the threat of the supernatural (i.e. the skeletal ship and the wrathful spirits). This correlation makes it appear as though the supernatural and nature share a potent bond with one another. One excerpt describes the weather as being impacted by the supernatural:

“And now the Storm-Blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased south along.
With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe

And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled” (Coleridge 41-50).

With the appearance of the albatross, events become slightly better and the sailors are gifted with good weather for a time. But as events become more dire the weather and the supernatural reflect this state; thus, creating a sense of overwhelming foreboding and terror that is reflective of the Gothic. This can especially be seen post-albatross death, and how nature is described in darker terms such as the ocean being depicted as, “...water, like a witch's oils,/ Burnt green, and blue and white” (Coleridge 129-130). These terms and passages help to portray the might and power of nature, making the Mariner and his fellow crewman afraid for their lives as they realized how little power they have relative to the might of nature and the supernatural elements that are correlated with it.

Like the Gothic movement, Romanticism is not easily defined, as it possesses a great many ideologies concerning such concepts like, human liberty, animal cruelty reform, sexual liberation, etc. Unlike the Gothic, Romanticism does not possess the same form of anachronism, where time seems to be disjointed. This correlation with time, the Gothic, and the Romantic is expounded upon in Joel Faflak’s discussion of the relationship between the two literary movements:

“The Romantic relationship to the Gothic, then, connects the effort of imagination to close all gaps between figures and objects through imaginative syntheses with the underlying awareness... [the] ‘Gothic’ itself, can drift across multiple reference points. They can suggest meanings tied to past realities yet obscure, or even...more recent perceptions and associations that those same figures represent” (Faflak 220).

This aspect helps to illustrate why ghosts, vampires, and other such undying figures are commonplace within the Gothic genre, while Romanticism is associated more with aesthetics. Oftentimes, Gothicism is even considered a subset of the Romantic movement. (Marshall). Marie Mulvey-Roberts states that, “Romanticism and Gothicism are inter-related in many ways...” and this is especially evident in the many shared literary traits within both movements have (Mulvey-Roberts 196). Both movements were a response against Enlightenment, and the ideals of order, propriety, and rational control that were associated with it (“The Romantic Period: Introduction”). Romanticism’s focus on nature, man, aesthetics, and liberty can be considered homologous to many of the traits and beliefs that are found in Gothicism. The literary response against Enlightenment and their shared values help to explain why both the Gothic and the Romantic have a predisposition with feelings of wonder, nature, the supernatural, and concepts beyond human control or understanding. Both movements not only share this passionate ideal, but they also interconnect in a variety of other different ways, including how they view nature and the supernatural as a source of power, awe, and inspiration.

While the Gothic focuses on creating a foreboding atmosphere with the use of nature and the supernatural, the Romantic also shares a similar sense of wonder of the same elements though with a different resolution in mind. The sublime helps in the illustration of these natural wonders, especially those aspects of nature that are free from human intervention and invoke potent feeling of wonder and fear (Black, et al. 358). Dr. Stephanie Forward expounds upon this subject of Romanticism and nature, stating that:

“Romantic verse was suffused with reverence for the natural world.... The Romantics were inspired by the environment, and encouraged people to venture into new territories – both literally and metaphorically. In their writings they made the world seem a place

with infinite, unlimited potential....A key idea in Romantic poetry is the concept of the sublime. This term conveys the feelings people experience when they see awesome landscapes, or find themselves in extreme situations which elicit both fear and admiration” (Forward).

The definition above detailing how Romanticism viewed the traits of the natural world and the sublime, possesses many similarities to the definition of the Gothic. Both explanations mention a wondrous state brought on by nature to elicit awe and fear in the viewer. Furthermore, they both utilize the same key languages of nature, the sublime and powerful emotion. While the Gothic is mostly concerned with the aspect of horror, the Romantic finds value in both states, particularly the grandeur and empirical beauty of nature (Black, et al. 358). To Romantics, nature has the power to “...restore peace to the mind and soul” (Tichelaar 117). Regardless of the minute differences between both movements, the emotions gained from the deep appreciation of nature were thought to help bring about enlightenment, whether through fear or awe.

The similar depiction of the supernatural is another concept that both Romanticism and Gothicism have in common. Both movements utilize ghosts, spirits, and occasionally angels and demons in order to convey their meanings and thoughts. While the threat of the supernatural (whether through actual events or events that can be explained in a realistic manner) are imperative to the drive of the Gothic, the Romantic is not limited as such. However, it is not unusual to see Romantic poets employ elements of the Gothic and vice versa. This is especially evident in the earlier analysis of Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” where spirits, Death, and a skeletal ship make their appearance within the poem. The use of supernatural elements in Romanticism also include beings like ghosts, as well as, spirits of nature and figures from Greek mythology. The use of mythological figures, such as fauns from John Keats’

“Lamia” and pagan gods from Lord Byron’s “Prometheus” are correlated with the this sense of the supernatural, as well as, the revival of classical romance and Greek literature during this time period.

Like *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* does not possess a supernatural element. However, the depiction of nature, especially in correlation with Mansfield Park has a profound presence in the novel in a similar manner that the natural settings of *Northanger Abbey* help to heighten the Gothic atmosphere. Mansfield Park is a representative of a country home and as such is, “well-proportioned, unpretending, as taking its forms, quite properly, from nature... as a reward for this imitation of nature, the house is surrounded by an unnatural abundance” (Claybaugh xviii). Only when the protagonist, Fanny Price, is relocated to her birth home and faces the misery there does she begin to miss Mansfield Park. While some readers and critics suggest that this homesickness could arise from her materialistic and superficial nature, the text suggests otherwise as illustrated by the following quote, “[t]he elegance, proprietary, regularity, harmony, and perhaps above all the peace and tranquility, of Mansfield were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here” (Austen 340-341). The house in the country is where Fanny finds peace and happiness as opposed to the tight and dirty living conditions of town life. In the city, Fanny is completely out of place, having been used to the grandeur of the estate’s grounds and connection with nature. She gets frequent headaches and weakens physically when she is away from Mansfield Park. This action helps to elevate the status of nature within the text, and also to facilitate the ideal of nature as a healing source for both the physical and mental state of an individual. It is not only nature’s presence or lack of presence within the novel that defines it, but also how the characters interact with nature that define them and heighten nature’s role within the text. Professor

Amanda Claybaugh observes that, “[i]t is only in the context of country-house writing that we can recognize the danger [Mary and Henry Crawford] represent. For Mary is not only contemptuous of religion, but also indifferent to nature, and she refuses to honor the seasonal rhythms of rural life” (Claybaugh xxiii). The distinction between Mary and Fanny as foils are thus heightened due to their regard of nature; it also helps to further justify how attuned Fanny and Edmund are to each other, as opposed to Edmund and Mary. Mary’s and Henry’s ideas concerning Thornton Lacey, as a symbol of the country home and nature, help to distinguish the protagonists from the antagonists. While Mary wants to change the land and Henry wanted to rent it for his own means, both Fanny and Edmund express a fondness for the land and feel that the true worth of a home comes from the occupant.

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is one of the most iconic romantic poems. In addition to possessing traditional gothic elements, the depiction of both nature and the supernatural strongly resonate with Romantic ideals. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is the perfect example of the fusion between Romantic and Gothic traits. Nature plays a significant role within the tale. It is due to the Albatross’ assistance that the Mariner and his fellow shipmates were able to free their ship from being overcome by ice. The appearance of the albatross is a sign of not only nature’s good-will, but also the benign, healing power that can come from nature itself. This is illustrated in the following passage, with the Mariner’s observation of the arrival of the albatross and the subsequent good weather that came with it:

“The ice was here, the ice was there,

The ice was all around...

At length did cross an Albatross:

Thorough the fog it came...

The ice did split with a thunder-fit...
And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!
In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine" (Coleridge 69-78).

Nature here, as represented by the albatross, is a force of goodwill. The fair weather and the illustration of the glimmering moonlight that comes with the albatross' appearance is described in a whimsical, almost magical way. This sort of quiet awe and wonder is in tune with how Romantic poets viewed the beauty and vigor of nature. The excerpt above, with the added benefit of showing a remedial aspect of nature, also depicts a correlation between nature and the power of the supernatural. As opposed to its use in the Gothic, this supernatural presence is helpful and benign, as it leads the sailors out of trouble; that is, until the mariner shoots the albatross with a crossbow. From that point, elements of the Gothic become a potent force within the narrative.

As depicted by Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the Gothic and Romantic movements are tightly interwoven with each other. The shared elements that are found in them at times make it difficult to differentiate a Romantic piece from a Gothic one, or as can be seen in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" there is a fusion of styles. Nature in both genres is described with a sense of wonder and awe. The potent emotions that emerge from this reverence are the same in both the Gothic and the Romantic; and

in both movements the use of the sublime is used to increase this emotion inspired by nature. The major difference between the two is that while the Gothic tries to evoke a more foreboding atmosphere, the Romantics tried to use the same aspect to invoke any sort of powerful emotion. In both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* nature was used in similar methods. In *Northanger Abbey* the description of nature helped to heighten the tense atmosphere, while in *Mansfield Park* the use of nature was used not only to illustrate the healing factors, but also to help separate the protagonists from the antagonists. “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” uses nature in both fashions, as an agent of healing and wonder, but also one that can strike terror and unease. This fusion of the Gothic and the Romantic is also seen again in “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” through depiction of the supernatural. The albatross can be seen as an initial benign supernatural force, that can be associated with the Romantic; the skeletal ship and Death itself can not only be considered part of the Romantic’s supernatural, but they’re also heavily Gothic in their portrayal.

The Gothic and Romantic movements are tightly interwoven with one another. Their shared values and traits are represented in the similar ways that nature and the supernatural are depicted in their works. Furthermore, as demonstrated with the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” it is not unusual to see Romantic works utilize Gothic elements and vice versa. Robert Hume mentions that:

“That Gothicism is closely related to Romanticism is perfectly clear, but it is easier to state the fact than to prove it tidily and convincingly. There is a persistent suspicion that Gothicism is a poor and probably illegitimate relation of Romanticism, and a consequent tendency to treat it that way. There are those, indeed, who would like to deny the relationship altogether” (Hume 282).

However, such a viewpoint is a disservice to both movements. Rather than viewing the movements as distinct, it would be more beneficial to see how they are conjoined with each other, and how Romantic works and Gothic works, such as *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, parallel each other in the depiction of nature or how “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” used both Romantic and Gothic elements. The Romantic and Gothic movement are so tightly interwoven with each other, it is almost impossible to separate them. John Keats, a highly influential Romantic poet, even called Ann Radcliffe, one of the founders of the Gothic Romance novel, “‘Mother Radcliffe’ ... because she had such an influence on Romantic poets.” (Forward). At the same extension, Radcliffe utilized numerous references from Romantic poets, like Coleridge. These influences between the writers of both movements and the movement’s shared values regarding nature and the supernatural have helped to make both the Gothic and the Romantic two sides of the same coin.

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