

## **GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE FOR AMBIENCE IN THE GOTHIC LITERATURE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This paper deals with the influence of Gothic architecture in literature. Here the authors try to study the rise of the gothic fiction or gothic horror. A detailed study of the of ambience creation using gothic structures is categorized in this paper. An interesting and intriguing study on the background painted in this genre reflecting the emotions of the major characters and mood of the drama is done in this paper. This paper studies how the different and sometimes contradictory forms like fiction, horror, death, suspense and even romance is established using the ambience of ruins and old structures in this type of literature.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

A very intriguing part of English literature is the Gothic fiction. There are many genres in the English literature based on literary technique, tone, content and sometimes even the length of a work. There are many genres in literature like comedy, tragedy, epic, satire, allegory, pastoral etc. there are also categorizations based on cultural movement of the historical period in which it is written. As said above a work is classified as a genre based on certain criteria. When it comes to the Gothic fiction theme, mood and the tone of the work helps in identifying a work as Gothic in nature.

To understand the Gothic fiction, it is essential to understand the dramatic settings of this type of fiction. Furthermore, only after an understanding of the architecture and structure of the Gothic and its history one can completely understand and accept the role of this in Gothic fiction.

### **DISCUSSION**

During the Medieval times there were many

problems in building big structures. The distribution of load in heavy buildings was a problem. The Gothic style of architecture was developed to solve these problems. After adopting this style in building churches, cathedrals and palaces, it became the most sought after style of construction and its influence can be felt and seen all over Europe.

The dark moody ambience of the gothic novels is predominant in creating the adventurous and mysterious settings. The romanticism of the previous age influences the gothic novels to some extent. Before this style, in 1100s and 1200s, the buildings were mostly dark, cold, damp and moody. There was not much scope for light and air circulation. With the invention of the Gothic style, there was light inside the building and they were airy and pleasant. In medieval period the buildings were functional and no thought was given for the aesthetic part. However, with Gothic style, beauty of the structure was also given equal importance (Fig. 1).

Forms were projected or incorporated into the exterior of the buildings. Instead of having a simple



Fig. 1 Exterior of the buildings.

rain gutter, a gargoyle was designed. These gargoyles looked terrifying with exaggerated evil features and sometimes even sprouted stone wings. With superstition playing a major role in the medieval period, these were seen as representation of evil forces waiting to devour the men. Later these figures were symbolically used to create ambience in Gothic novels.

It is surprising to note that the term Gothic was not applied to this style of construction when it came into being. The term came much later. There are certain characteristics which are exclusive to the Gothic architecture. The most obvious was the height of the structure. Previously due to problems in load distribution, the structures were squat and thin. New techniques allowed them to build very tall structures, almost like touching the sky or reaching the heaven; very apt for churches and cathedrals. So the buildings were tall, grand and graceful.

Another unique character is the flying buttress. These are external structures which spread the weight of the tall walls and transfer the weight directly to the ground. Though they were vital in solving the load distribution of buildings in the medieval period they were also decorative, being elaborately designed with intricate carvings, projecting grandeur and majesty.

Pointed arch is another significant feature of the Gothic architecture. Like many other characteristics of Gothic architecture, the use of pointed arch is both practical and decorative. It distributes the force of heavier ceilings and bulky wall. It also supports much more weight than previously used pillars. The pointed arches were a thing of beauty and grace and gave rise to the vaulted ceilings. Light, bright windows, airy interiors were a welcome relief after

living in the dark, dingy, moody and damp structures of the medieval buildings. With Gothic architecture beauty and aesthetic values were incorporated.

With the increasing popularity many builders went on to build structures to rival existing ones. This created many awe inspiring cathedrals, churches and public structures which to this day is creation of wonder.

Initially this style of architecture was called 'Modern Style' and was viewed as revolutionary. However, during the time of Renaissance, the renaissance architects scoffed at this style preferring classical, solid, symmetrical style. To show their scorn for the renaissance architects coined the term 'Gothic architecture'. Goths were barbarians who wreaked havoc in Europe hundreds of years earlier.

Now that the author has explained the characteristics of the Gothic architecture, it is essential to move on to the Gothic fiction to understand the vital role played by these structures in creating the ambience of the novel.

As discussed earlier, the Gothic style of architecture aimed at providing airy light interiors with huge windows usually decorated with stained glass, tall towers, pointed arches, vaulted ceilings etc. These provided a comfortable dwelling place. However, in the Gothic literature these took on an opposite image. The elements of a gothic novel included an old manor type house or a castle. With lots of gloominess, strangeness, sense of evil and mystery. One must remember that the gothic novel slowly came into being in the late 18th century and the Gothic buildings were hundreds of years old. Compared to the modern architecture they would have looked old and in many cases were unused buildings. There

were also many ruins of these structures strewn all over England and Europe. These pleased the artistic mind of the writers who wanted to create an ambience of mystery, horror with gloomy and decaying structures, haunted houses and extreme human emotions manifesting in these settings.

In most of the novels the action takes place in or near a castle. The castle looms in the background almost throughout the action. There are many secret passages and rooms, trap doors, hidden staircases etc. The castles are usually connected to caves and mysterious creatures.

The surprisingly beautiful and graceful structures are changed into dark and mysterious settings. A storm with thunder and lightning is added to give the extra chill factor. The atmosphere is transformed into one of darkness instilling fear and terror in the characters. The ambience of the structure is used to symbolize the volatile emotions of the major characters of the plot. The dark and ill lit interiors create a sense of unease and foreboding of ill things to happen later.

A fear of the unknown exists because of the strange noises in the building. It might be just an old hose settling down or someone/something stalking in the night. Omens and visions are also elements used to heighten the sense of terror and mystery. An old

prophecy related to the castle of its inhabitants is another element of the Gothic novel.

The Gothic architecture sets a dramatic background for such dramatic events like ghost appearance, inanimate objects moving or talking. It seems more believable for readers to imagine such events occurring in this background.

The gothic structure also serves to be the ideal background for extreme emotions like rage, sorrow, shock, terror and violence. The lack of color in these buildings also add on to the sense of impending doom felt by the characters. The female character in these novels face events that terrorize them. They are helpless and try to learn the secrets around them. They seem to stumble upon the secret doors or hidden rooms in the castle heightening the mystery of the happenings.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Gothic novel retains a lot of the gothic structures to emphasize and dramatize the plot of the novels. The mood is dramatically and immediately built with the castle to the abandoned house which the characters reside in. The elements of the Gothic novel have indeed partially kept the Gothic architecture in fashion to this day.