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**A Study of "The Gothic Elements in Romantic Literature" With A
Focus on Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe's Works**

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Abstract:

This research paper begins a thorough investigation of Gothic aspects found in Romantic literature, with a focus on Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe's contributions. Gothic literature has always captivated readers and academics alike due to its creepy settings, paranormal components, and themes of dread and the unknown. In the broader context of Romanticism, this paper explores how Edgar Allan Poe's and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" both embody and surpass the Gothic tradition.

The research entails a thorough examination of crucial Gothic components found in the chosen works, including the sublime, the grotesque, the uncanny, and the macabre. This essay reveals the subtle ways in which Shelley and Poe use Gothic conventions to address important societal issues of their respective eras, such as scientific ethics, mortality, and psychological horror. It does this through rigorous textual examination and comparative analysis.

Furthermore, this study emphasised how these authors' contributions to Gothic Romanticism have impacted succeeding generations of authors as well as the broader field of speculative fiction. This research not only deepens our comprehension of literary history but also illustrates the Gothic's on-going fascination within the larger literary fabric as we travel through the mysterious and ominous corridors of Gothic Romanticism.

Introduction

The Romantic period, which was marked by its celebration of individualism, emotion, and a strong bond with nature, represents a dynamic period in literary history. The Gothic, however, is a darker and more enigmatic thread in the rich fabric of Romanticism. Gothic components, with their spooky settings, paranormal activities, and explorations of the human psyche, found their place within the Romantic milieu, resulting in an intriguing synthesis that never ceases to fascinate readers and academics alike.

In order to understand the complex interactions between Romantic and Gothic aspects of literature, this research study sets out on a trip into the heart of Romanticism. It highlights Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, two eminent figures in this genre confluence. We delve into the gloomy and intriguing realms of these authors' literary creations by examining how they used Gothic aspects in their works.



Romanticism and the Gothic subgenre were not simply brought together by happenstance; rather, it was a reaction to the changing socio-cultural environment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. A desire for the enigmatic, the weird, and the sublime found literary expression as the rationalism of the Enlightenment age contrasted with the turbulent aftermath of the French Revolution. Romantic authors frequently used Gothic motifs to give their stories a sense of otherworldliness in an effort to depict the depths of human emotion and the majestic majesty of nature. Through her masterpiece "Frankenstein," Mary Shelley explored the limits of science and morality in a setting where the otherworldly and human ambition collide. In his tales of terror, Edgar Allan Poe, a master of macabre fiction, investigated the depths of the human brain and the frightening reaches of the subconscious.

The goal of this research paper is to analyse the Gothic components weaved into Romantic literature. It will look at the precise strategies used by Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, from the barren settings and troubled minds to the spectral and horrific, to elicit a Gothic feeling in their works. Additionally, it will go into the worlds of psychological horror, the uncanny, and the enduring obsession with life, death, and everything that lies beyond in order to explore the thematic depths that these Gothic components dipped into.

We will take into account not only the literary contributions of Shelley and Poe but also the more general ramifications of this genre fusion as we make our way through the maze-like passageways of Romantic Gothic literature. How did these authors capture the zeitgeist? What historical and cultural circumstances influenced the development of Gothic aspects of Romanticism and their ongoing allure? The most intriguing question is: how have these works persisted in influencing later generations of authors, maintaining the Gothic's ongoing dominance of the literary canon?

Historical Background

It is crucial to situate this phenomenon within its historical context in order to comprehend the genesis and development of Gothic aspects within Romantic literature. Romanticism is typically linked with the late 18th and early 19th centuries, but there was actually a complex interaction of cultural, political, and intellectual influences at this time. These environmental circumstances not only aided in the development of Romanticism but also made it easier for Gothic themes to be included in this literary style.



- **The Legacy of Enlightenment**

The 18th century saw the height of the Enlightenment, which promoted rationalism, empiricism, and the notion that rationality might advance humankind. Philosophers like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant argued that human reason should be given priority over established norms and religious doctrine. A wave of scientific advancements, political upheavals, and a growing faith in the potential of human agency were all spurred by this intellectual movement.

The turbulent aftermath of the French Revolution (1789–1799), which brought about significant social and political changes, including the overthrow of monarchs and the emergence of radical ideologies, confronted the Enlightenment's ideals as they expanded throughout Europe. As the Enlightenment's promises of development contrasted with the brutal realities of political violence and societal instability, this time of upheaval created a feeling of uncertainty and worry.

- **The beautiful and the extraordinary**

The Romantic movement evolved as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment against this backdrop of societal change and unease. Romantics placed an emphasis on personal expression and the sublime in nature as they strove to explore the emotional and irrational parts of human nature. They held the natural wilderness in high regard, seeing it as a source of inspiration and frequently depicting it as a place where the human soul may find comfort and transcendence.

Gothic aspects of Romantic literature were able to flourish in this setting. The Gothic provided a contrast to the Enlightenment's reason with its love of gloomy settings, possessed castles, and spectral phenomena. Romantic writers' interest in the unexplainable and the supernatural gave them a canvas on which to express their ideas.

- **Both Romanticism and the Gothic Revival**

The Gothic novel first appeared in the late 18th century, with popular works like Ann Radcliffe's "The Mysteries of Udolpho" (1794) and Horace Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" (1764). Readers' imaginations were captured by these stories' depictions of historical ruin, damsels in distress, and furious spirits.



The Romantic movement's pursuit of the sublime and intensified emotion coincided well with the appeal of the Gothic. Deeply influenced by this literary tradition, writers like Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe used Gothic themes to add a sense of mystery and terror to their writings.

The chaotic period after the French Revolution and the historical setting of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, characterised by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, provided the foundation for the inclusion of Gothic themes into Romantic literature. The Gothic gave rise to a distinctive and enduring literary fusion by providing Romantic authors with a means of exploring the darker, more enigmatic aspects of human existence and the natural world.

Romantic Literature with Gothic Elements

A strong merger of two different literary traditions can be seen in the introduction of Gothic elements into Romantic literature. Gothic themes provided authors with a way to explore the shadowy corners of human existence and to generate a sense of the mysterious and sublime within the Romantic Movement, which was distinguished by its emphasis on individualism, emotion, and communion with nature.

i. Unsettling and Alone Locations

The use of gloomy and secluded surroundings was one aspect of Gothic writing that found a home in Romanticism. Romantic writers like Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe regularly used barren settings, dilapidated castles, and isolated, unsettling places to set the scene for their stories. These locations functioned as both literal backdrops and metaphorical landscapes that reflected the protagonists' inner struggles. For instance, the bleakness of the Arctic wasteland in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" parallels the creature's inner solitude.

ii. The extraordinary and the unexplainable

A concern with the paranormal and the strange lies at the core of Gothic literature. Authors like Shelley and Poe expertly incorporated supernatural themes into their stories. In "Frankenstein," Mary Shelley wrestles with the repercussions of Victor Frankenstein's bold scientific experiment, which involved creating a creature using unusual methods. The act of meddling with the natural order blurs the line between science and the supernatural, raising concerns about the boundaries of human



knowledge and the moral ramifications of doing so.

Poe, on the other hand, excelled at writing horrific stories where the supernatural and the psychological frequently mixed. The deteriorating mansion and its tragic residents in "The Fall of the House of Usher" create a foreboding atmosphere, and the story's shocking conclusion leaves readers wondering where the line between fact and illusion lies.

iii. Psychological dread and internal unrest

The study of psychological horror and internal conflict was one of the most important contributions of Gothic themes to Romantic literature. The darkest sides of human nature were uncovered by both Shelley and Poe as they probed the human psyche. In "Frankenstein," the creature's existential suffering and solitude arouse strong empathy, while Victor's internal conflict with guilt and obsession serves as a lesson in the dangers of unchecked ambition.

Poe, a master of the unreliable narrator, frequently transported readers inside the heads of characters who were on the verge of going insane. The psyche of the narrators in tales like "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat"—whose guilt and fear lead them to execute horrific acts—is frighteningly revealed.

iv. Life, Death, and Transcendence Themes

Life, death, and transcendence were important topics in romantic gothic literature. The desire for eternal life, the terror of dying, and the fascination with death as a portal to the unknown all play a significant role. In "Frankenstein," the quest to bring life back to life questions conventional ideas of mortality and divinity. Similar struggles between humanity and the unstoppable forces of death are shown in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," where revellers make fruitless attempts to flee the plague's wrath.

The examination of the uncanny, the supernatural, and the human psyche was made possible by the Gothic aspects present in Romantic literature, as typified by the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. This enhanced the Romantic movement. This blending of genres enabled authors to explore the more sinister sides of life while upholding the Romantic emphasis on feeling,



uniqueness, and the sublime, creating a literary heritage that still enthralls and intrigues readers today.

Mary Shelley's Contribution: "Frankenstein" and the Birth of a Modern Prometheus

"Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus," a landmark work by Mary Shelley, who is frequently referred to as the "Mother of Science Fiction," left an enduring impression on both Gothic and Romantic literature when it was released in 1818. Shelley skillfully combined Gothic and Romantic elements in her book to produce a story that has endured through the ages among readers, academics, and authors.

1. The Gothic Setting: Isolation and Desolation

Gothic settings are best exemplified in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and other Romantic works of literature. Landscapes that are both hauntingly beautiful and forlorn serve as the backdrop for the novel's action. Shelley's rich depictions of natural surroundings function as both physical locales and metaphorical representations of her characters' emotional states, from the loneliness of the Arctic wasteland to the majestic majesty of the Swiss Alps.

Key characters, especially Victor Frankenstein and his creature, face emotional isolation that is mirrored by the remoteness and isolation of these locales. A subject that fits with the romantic interest in the individual's struggle against social conventions and the pursuit of one's place in the world is the creature's birth into a world that rejects him right away.

2. The Ambition of Science and the Supernatural

Mary Shelley's investigation of the supernatural, coupled with themes of scientific ambition and the results of stepping outside of natural limitations, is one of her most significant contributions to the Gothic genre within Romantic literature. Victor Frankenstein's risky experiment, which involved reviving dead tissue to give it life, is an example of the union of science and the supernatural that enthralled readers in her day and still serves as a timeless cautionary tale today.

Victor's arrogance in trying to push the limits of life and death is consistent with Gothic culture's preoccupation with the illegal and the macabre. The ethical conundrums and moral repercussions of such wrongdoings are highlighted by Shelley's depiction of the creature's creation, the spooky laboratory, and the accompanying horrors—a recurring issue in contemporary concerns of science



and ethics.

3. The Torment of the Creature's Existence

The creature's existential suffering and alienation are handled masterfully by Mary Shelley in this Gothic-style psychological horror work. A moving depiction of the human condition, the creature's transformation from innocence to bitterness and revenge reflects the Romantic emphasis on individuality and the inner conflicts of the human psyche.

By questioning readers' preconceived ideas of the monstrous, Shelley's narrative choices, notably her choice to give the creature a voice, inspire readers to empathise with his misery. This feature of "Frankenstein" demonstrates Shelley's skill at fusing Romantic themes of empathy, compassion, and the nuanced interplay of human emotions with Gothic horror.

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" is a fundamental piece of Romantic literature that expertly incorporates Gothic aspects. Shelley made a vital contribution to the ongoing appeal of Romantic Gothic literature by deftly fusing Gothic settings, supernatural themes, and explorations of the human psyche. Assuring its place as a cornerstone of both Gothic and Romantic literary traditions, her book continues to stand as a potent example of how human aspiration, scientific ethics, and the on-going search to grasp the mysteries of life and creation intertwine.

Edgar Allan Poe's contribution: Master of the Macabre and the Gothic Imagination

In the field of Gothic writing during the Romantic era, Edgar Allan Poe, an American literary legend and a pioneer of the macabre, is regarded as a towering figure. His writings, which are rife with psychological horror, spooky settings, and tales of the strange, had a significant influence on how Gothic elements were incorporated into the Romantic style.

i. Psychological Horror and the Unreliable Narrator

Edgar Allan Poe's mastery of the unreliable narrator is one of his most important contributions to Gothic within Romantic literature. Poe regularly transported his audience into the heads of narrators whose views were clouded by madness, obsession, or remorse. The distinction between truth and illusion was muddled by this strategy, which produced an environment of ambiguity and dread.



The mental instability and psychological terror at the heart of the Gothic tradition are highlighted in tales like "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," where the narrators' spiral into insanity and admissions of horrible actions are key elements. Poe's writings gain depth and complexity through the investigation of fragmented psyches and the terror of one's own mind, which gives them a distinctively Gothic flavour.

ii. dim and ominous settings

Another distinguishing feature of Poe's contribution to Romantic Gothic fiction is his talent for creating ominous and evocative environments. His novels frequently take place in dilapidated homes, tombs, and tunnels beneath the earth—settings that convey a sense of gloom and decay. In Poe's writings, the physical setting mirrors the psychological moods of the individuals, portraying their inner anguish and torment.

For instance, in "The Fall of the House of Usher," the family's collapsing mansion serves as a metaphor for how the sanity and history of the family are eroding. Readers are drawn into a world where the lines between reality and the supernatural are hazy as a result of these locations, which heighten the creepy and cramped atmosphere essential to the Gothic genre.

iii. Macabre and death-related themes

The macabre, decay, and death-related themes that Poe explores are very much in line with Gothic literary traditions. His interest in necrophilia, early burial, and the menacing presence of death give his works an unnerving tone that appeals to the Gothic sensibility.

In his story "The Masque of the Red Death," Edgar Allan Poe describes a masquerade dance where guests attempt to flee a fatal illness but end up dying horribly. Because the Gothic tradition is preoccupied with the unknown and inevitability, this story emphasises the inevitable confrontation with mortality.



iv. The sublimely romantic

Poe's writings are heavily influenced by the Gothic, but they also show a connection to the Romantic sublime—the breath-taking, frequently terrifying beauty of nature. For example, in "The Pit and the Pendulum," the protagonist's terrifying experience in a dark dungeon is contrasted with the sudden illumination of the chamber's walls, which reveals the ominous descent of a large pendulum.

This particular instance perfectly encapsulates the sublime—that combination of beauty, terror, and wonder frequently seen in Romantic literature. Poe's stories have a distinctive fusion of Romantic and Gothic sensibility because of his deft exploitation of these components.

Poe's mastery of the unreliable narrator, his creation of gloomy and atmospheric settings, his research of psychological horror, and his themes of death and the macabre are what distinguish his contributions to the introduction of Gothic elements into Romantic fiction. Poe's contributions to Gothic literary history during the Romantic era were not only richer, but he also left readers with a lasting legacy that still enthralls and haunts them, demonstrating the everlasting strength of the Romantic Gothic literary heritage.

Themes in Romantic Gothic Literature:

With its fusion of the Gothic's concern with the supernatural and mysticism with Romanticism's emphasis on emotion and independence, romantic gothic literature explores a complex tapestry of themes that still speak to readers today. Several recurring themes can be seen in the writings of authors like Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe:

1. Isolation and alienation

Isolation and alienation are major themes in Romantic Gothic literature. Characters frequently experience social exclusion or a sense of isolation from their surroundings. The creature in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" exhibits this subject through its severe isolation as a result of being scorned by both its creator and society at large. The suffering of the creature is a moving reflection of how much people seek connection and the effects of social exclusion.



2. Human Nature's Duality

Romantic Gothic literature usually examines the opposition of good and evil, reason and irrationality, as well as the dual aspect of human nature. Particularly, the characters of Edgar Allan Poe struggle with internal tensions. Robert Louis Stevenson explores the idea of duality in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by developing a figure that can change into a terrifying alter ego. The complexity of the human psyche is a subject that the Romantics were interested in exploring.

3. The Influence of Nature

A major element in Romantic Gothic literature is the love for nature that characterises the Romantic Movement. It is common to see images of nature that are both beautiful and awe-inspiring, as well as mysterious and dangerous. The dual nature of the natural world in Romantic Gothic literature is illustrated by writers like Mary Shelley, who mirrored the emotional moods of her characters in the natural world, and Edgar Allan Poe, who infused the sublime beauty of nature into his stories.

4. The Paranormal and the Strange

The supernatural and the uncanny are common themes in Gothic literature. Romantic Gothic literature is rife with supernatural elements that defy logical explanation, such as the reanimated creature in "Frankenstein" or the spectral apparitions in Poe's tales. These paranormal events are used to increase anxiety, arouse terror, and blur the lines between the known and the unknown.

5. Seeking out forbidden information

A reoccurring topic that ties into the Gothic tradition's concern with the forbidden and the macabre is the desire for forbidden knowledge. Victor Frankenstein from Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein explores the forbidden territory of scientific experimentation out of his desire to conquer death, with disastrous results. This motif acts as a sobering reminder of the limits of human curiosity and the ethical ramifications of going beyond natural constraints.



6. Death, Mortality, and Immortality,

Death, mortality, and the search for immortality are perennial themes that are addressed throughout romantic gothic literature. Writers like Edgar Allan Poe explore the obsession with death and the terror of the afterlife. Poe, for instance, powerfully depicts a hopeless endeavour to elude death's inescapable grasp in "The Masque of the Red Death." These topics encourage readers to think about the unsolved questions of life and the limits of human comprehension.

The topics of Romantic Gothic literature, as demonstrated by the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, dive deeply into the human psyche and reflect the concerns and aspirations of the Romantic age. Romantic Gothic literature's continued relevance and allure in the literary world is ensured by the topics that still strike a chord with modern audiences.

Reception and influence

The reception of Gothic aspects in Romantic literature was complex, and writers like Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe had a lasting impact on the literary world with their works that resonated beyond centuries.

i. Initial reception

The introduction of Gothic themes into Romantic literature was praised and criticised during the Romantic era. While some critics and readers welcomed the combination, others were sceptical of it. Some people believed that the inclusion of spooky locations, paranormal activity, and psychological terror represented a deviation from the principles of reason and Enlightenment thought.

Upon its release in 1818, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" received conflicting reviews. Some praised its inventive blending of science fiction and the Gothic, while others expressed alarm about its alleged moral undertones. The eerie and psychological themes in Edgar Allan Poe's stories attracted both supporters and opponents. Nevertheless, these books attracted a devoted readership, demonstrating the Romantic Gothic genre's ongoing popularity.

ii. Enduring Appeal

In spite of early disagreements, Gothic themes in Romantic literature have a permanent position in the canon. Readers and academics all around the world have remained enthralled by "Frankenstein"



by Mary Shelley and the terrifying and mysterious tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

Ethics, bioethics, and the philosophy of science continue to be examined in relation to Shelley's investigation of the ethical ramifications of scientific ambition and the moral conundrums of creation. The creature from the novel Frankenstein has come to stand for themes of alienation, identity, and the results of human deeds.

Poe made unrivalled contributions to the Gothic and horror genres. Numerous authors of horror, mystery, and suspense have been affected by his mastery of psychological horror and his original narrative strategies. Poe's investigation into the uncanny and the human psyche had a significant influence on the growth of both American and international literature.

iii. Subsequent Generations and Adaptations

Romantic Gothic literature has had a significant impact far beyond the 19th century. The Gothic tradition started by Shelley and Poe served as an inspiration for later writers like H.P. Lovecraft, Stephen King, and Anne Rice. The human condition, the supernatural, and isolation are still prevalent themes in modern literature, demonstrating the Gothic components' pervasive significance.

Additionally, Romantic Gothic literature has had a significant influence on several adaptations and reinterpretations in popular culture. The themes and motifs created by Shelley and Poe have been used in a large number of movies, television shows, and other types of media. The Gothic aesthetic continues to be a rich source of inspiration for artists, from vintage horror movies like "Bride of Frankenstein" to contemporary adaptations of the Gothic in programs like "American Horror Story."

Gothic features have had a significant and ongoing impact on Romantic literature, as seen in the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. In spite of early disagreements, these writers' contributions to the union of Romanticism and the Gothic have had a lasting impact on literature and continue to intrigue readers, historians, and producers, demonstrating the Romantic Gothic tradition's persistent strength.

Conclusion

The works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, which represent the fusion of Gothic and Romantic literature, are a monument to the continuing ability of narrative to shed light on the most inscrutable facets



of human experience. The investigation into the use of Gothic genre components in Romantic literature that this research paper undertook revealed a complex tapestry of themes, stories, and inspirations.

We saw the emergence of a contemporary Prometheus via Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," a work that dared to push the bounds of morality and science. Readers were given a reflection of the human condition, a sobering warning of the results of unrestrained ambition, and a sensitive investigation of the outcast thanks to Shelley's clever incorporation of Gothic settings, the supernatural, and existential suffering.

The king of the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe, invited us inside his mysterious inner world, where unreliable narrators battled inner demons and the distinction between fact and illusion became hazy. His psychological horror stories, spooky locations, and themes of death and mortality continue to enthrall and unnerve readers, bearing witness to the complexity of the human psyche and the pervasive attraction of the weird.

The themes found in Romantic Gothic literature—alienation and solitude, the dual nature of humanity, the magnificent power of nature, the uncanny, and the supernatural—reflect the concerns, aspirations, and ageless issues of the Romantic period. The Gothic components in Romantic literature gave authors a distinctive canvas to explore these issues on, enticing readers to face the unknowable and explore the depths of the human psyche.

Romantic Gothic literature was occasionally met with controversy and mistrust, yet its impact has lasted throughout history. Poe's tales of terror and other works like "Frankenstein" have been popular for a long time, which is evidence of how captivating and thought-provoking these narratives can be. The Gothic literary tradition served as a source of inspiration for later writers, and its themes are still being revived for new audiences through popular cultural adaptations.

In conclusion, Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe reflect a literary heritage that continues to captivate readers, academics, and producers alike through their synthesis of Gothic themes with Romantic literature. It is a tradition that challenges us to ponder the mysticism of the human condition, face our anxieties, and wrestle with the complexity of our own selves. We are reminded that even in the deepest recesses of our imagination, there exists a strong and persistent fascination with the unknown, the strange, and the magnificent as we travel across the landscapes of Romantic Gothic literature.



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