Main Features of the English Gothic Novel

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Abstract:
The present work is intended to highlight some general lines common to the English Gothic literature mainly until the 1890s. After locating literary Gothicism and presenting some general features shared by the Gothic novels, attention will be paid to the atmosphere, the stock features, narrative techniques, themes and symbols present in such type of writings. A special place is played by the language of terror that generates fear, awe, suspense, emotion, excitement, ontological uncertainty. As far as the Gothic aesthetics is concerned, the illustrative examples are meant to certify once more the place of the Gothic novel among the texts embodying and evoking cultural anxieties.

Keywords: *atmosphere, disturbance of boundaries, double, language of terror, excess, English Gothic novel*

1. Introduction – The Gothic Writing

As far as literary Gothicism is concerned, there is common appreciation of the classical Gothic as belonging to the 1790s. Concerning the later periods or whether the post-Romantic Gothic is to be distinguished from adjacent genres such as science fiction, fantasy and horror, opinions have not yet reached a firm consensus. According to David Punter, the Gothic can be viewed as either as a historically delimited genre or as a more-wide-ranging and persistent tendency within fiction as a whole.

Critics have wondered whether the Gothic genre is to be said to exist after 1825 or so. Nicholas Daly, for instance, rejects the formulation of Gothic as a literary mode that lingers on, in the Victorian period and afterwards, like a trace of the eighteenth-century Gothic fiction. But if we are to adopt the opinion according to which Gothic is a genre that re-emerges at different historical moments and is designed to explore and manage taboo areas of particular cultures, then almost all texts that treat social transgression could be seen as Gothic, rendering the category meaningless. Most critics have found it useful to maintain an understanding of Gothic as a transhistorical genre, with plot elements and settings that may change, yet preserving exorbitance, piling incident upon incident, overcharged with a fearsome and brooding atmosphere. The nature of social transgression may differ from one epoch to another, and clinical comprehension of mental disorder change as

well, nevertheless, the Gothic will show a fascination with extreme behaviour and derangement of human subjectivity.

Although various studies have presented the Gothic either as an aesthetic, or as a great repressed Romanticism, or as a poetics, the approach that is closest to our present study is David Punter and Judith Halberstam's acceptation of it as a narrative technique. Gothic's definition in Halberstam's terms as "overdetermined – which is to say, open to numerous interpretations," the domain of the relation of Gothic to Romantic ideology is a Gothic one, as Gothic's presence in Romantic writing is characterized by "multiple interpretations ... [of] multiple modes of consumption and production, [of] dangerous consumption and excessive productivity, and [of] economies of meaning." (Halberstam, 1995, 92-93)

 The Gothic may be envisaged as a sort of historical or sociological index as long as it serves to manage a culture's disturbances and traumatic changes, its thematic preoccupations allowing us "to track social anxieties at one remove, in the register of supernaturalism." (Ibidem, 97) We may view the Gothic as a hybrid form including and converting both other literary forms and its own rules according to different aesthetic trends. Whereas the classical was well-ordered, simple, pure and offered a set of cultural models to be followed, the Gothic was chaotic, ornate, convoluted, representing excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and uncivilized. The extensions in meaning mirror the word "Gothic" as retaining a stock of connotations, the values placed upon them being under constant transformation during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It is always to be found as a concatenation of dualities: old-fashioned as opposed to modern, barbaric as opposed to the civilized, crudity as opposed to elegance etc. Gothic fiction appears at first glance to be a relatively homogenous body of writing linked stylistically, thematically and ideologically, but at a closer look it is nothing but a "very disparate collection of works." Its relation to the general Gothic revival was tangential, yet with some important points of contact.

2. Features of the Gothic Writing in English Literature

2.a. Basic Elements

The Gothic writing is difficult to define as a homogenous category because its changing features, emphases and meanings disclose it as a mode that exceeds genre and categories restricted neither to a literary school nor to a historical period. (cf. Botting, 1996, 14). The fact that contemporary readers enjoy reading novels such as Dracula proves that there is no difficulty in perceiving the atmosphere of such literary productions, that the distance separating the world evoked in them and our present reality is neither insufficient nor too ample. Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto,* "A Gothic Story", introduced the basic elements of the Gothic: the medieval setting, the constant expectation of supernatural events bringing with them horror, fear, anxiety and evil, the victimized women, who are also defiant and strong within, the use of confined and dark spaces (castles, monasteries, dungeons), the confrontation of hero and villain etc.

The genre is defined as mainly dealing with excess, according to Fred Botting: excessive imagery, excessive rhetoric, excessive narrative and excessive effect. Still, in late Victorian novels one may discern an overlapping of Gothic and science fiction merging into horror. Since the modernist era is the extended moment during which, perhaps, the genre known as Gothic metamorphoses into horror, it would be tempting to follow Judith Halberstam and speak about the hybrid genre Gothic horror.

Horace Walpole is the first writer who entitled his work a "Gothic story," bringing the term from the domain of architecture to that of the literature.[1] Not after a long time the anonymously-written "Terrorist Novel Writing" prescribes a recipe that guaranteed to produce a frisson in the voracious consumers of the Gothic novel: an old castle, a long gallery, murdered bodies, quite fresh. It was only one of several such articles to appear in the journals of the late 1790s. Horace Walpole's novel presents many of the features that came to define a new genre of fiction, such as the feudal historical and architectural setting, the deposed noble heir and the ghostly, supernatural machinations. Walpole's two prefaces speak about some work of antiquarians with which he was familiar – the translator of the story claiming that it was printed in Gothic script in Italy in 1529 but originates at the time of the Crusades.

Fred Botting considers that the literary and fictional background to the Gothic revival is clearly manifested as an artificial or fabricated aesthetic phenomenon. The same idea is emphasized by Jerrold E. Hogle, who sees *The Castle of Otranto* as complicated in various levels of counterfeiting: a fake translation by a fake translator of a fake medieval story by a fake author, the novel turns on a false nobleman unlawfully inheriting both title and propriety through a false will and attempting to secure a false lineage through evil schemes.(cf.Botting, 200, 4). Artificiality seems to surround the historical and cultural origins of Gothic productions. The history in which the Gothic occurs is itself a fabrication of the eighteenth century as it expresses the long passage from the religious and chivalric feudalism to the more and more secularized and commercial political economy of liberalism. The Gothic spirit of liberty was associated with a legacy to European nations in opposition to despotic and military yoke of Rome and an oriental tyranny. Botting views the Gothic as the mirror of the eighteenth century values and mores, "a reconstruction of the past as the inverted, mirror image of the present, its darkness allows the reason and virtue of the present a brighter reflection." (Ibidem, 5). In Michel Foucault's terms (as expressed in "Of other spaces," *Diacritics*, 16.1, 1986), this type of mirror functions utopically as "the inverted analogy with the real space of society." (Ibidem). Botting goes on with the discussion upon the function of the mirror, a placeless place, which enables a self-definition and produces a sense of depth and distance in what Foucault names "the virtual space that opens up behind the surface." One could see beyond the sense of discontinuity through inversion and distancing offered by the Gothic and distinguish an

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[1] Although the significance of the Gothic culture was cited in British political discussions from the mid-seventeenth century, the word was employed loosely, being implicated in an ongoing political struggle over meanings. The past that was labelled Gothic was a site of struggle between enlightened forces of progress and more conservative impulses to retain continuity.

idealisation of elements of the past and the establishment of a continuity with the present – the myth of the Goths appearing as a means to serve specific political and emotional purposes. Angela Keane, considering the appeal to a Gothic past of strength, nobility and liberty, and the aesthetic tradition of the picturesque, brings into discussion "both the nature of a stolen British liberty and of the barbaric culture out of which native neoclassicism triumphantly arose." Samuel Kliger envisages the Gothic propaganda more in terms of a desire, structured not on a real past, but on an imagined, mythical sort of unity, remaining, therefore, no more than an ideal: "Perhaps it is true that the Gothic ideal in England remained no more than an ideal." (Ibidem, 6).

2.b. Language and Style

Michel Foucault states the place of the Gothic writing taking into consideration one of the principal sources of horror - the labyrinth of language: "The language of terror is dedicated to an endless expense, even though it only seeks to achieve a single effect. It drives itself out of any possible resting place. Sade and the novels of terror introduce an essential imbalance within the works of language: they force them of necessity to be always excessive and efficient" (Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity", p.65)

Evoking excessive emotion, the Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developed a rational or properly cultivated response. We may therefore speak about the perlocutionary force of the Gothic novel as it intends to produce a certain effect upon the readers through the illocutionary act. In Gothic writings imagination and emotional effects exceed reason.

The tonal and modal discordances in *The Castle of Otranto* are among the novel's most striking stylistic features and the sources of most of the work's comedy, as well. This tonal instability of *The Castle of Otranto* lends an air of recklessness to the novel that is intensified by the story's pace. If Walpole's critics expressed uncertainty about the efficacy of his spectres and the effect of his characters, they almost all agreed on his ability to keep the reader entertained. Macaulay expresses this in the following way: "There are no digressions, or unseasonable descriptions, or long speeches. Every sentence carries the action forward. The excitement is constantly renewed." (Napier, 1987, 80) The speed and structure of Walpole's narrative point to a preoccupation with connectiveness that is recapitulated in the plot of the tale, based as it is on mysterious, or partially known, relationships and in its imagery, which revolves around the fragmentation of a body that achieves wholeness at the story's end.(Ibidem, 91) Related to this interest in rapid narrative movement and the fragmented (or incomplete) story unit is Walpole's interest in interruption as a device to generate suspense and to heighten the reader's sense of frenetic activity. When conversations are broken at crucial moments (for example at the death of the hermit, or during Jerome's explanation to Theodore of his lineage), the reader is hurried from one incident to the next with irresistible force. Walpole's need to explore the details of his hero's character is curtailed: one can speak of its resemblance to the portrait, in a pattern that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick finds characteristic of the Gothic fiction (Kosofsky,1981, 255-70). Manfred, when angered, tends to display his rage in a similarly overt manner, by slamming doors, leaving his companions abruptly, or hastening to other parts of the castle. Elizabeth Napier views Walpole as conceiving his

characters functionally referring to his tendency to value plot and remarkable event over character development. His treatment of characters is explained by his interest to move the storyline ahead. In the cases when the narrator insists on Manfred's innate gentleness, this description "fails to convince, in part because Walpole, fascinated by excess, is only interested in having Manfred act out his passionate side. Walpole errs in thinking that narrative description can overpower dramatic action here; indeed, this shift of Manfred's character is designed precisely to facilitate a new action." (Napier, 94) David Punter remarks the same aspect, considering his characters "neither lifelike nor reasonable in themselves," postured as "puppets." (Ibidem, 45). Walpole's characters are charged with an impossible task of remaining realistic in unreal situations. Thus, the character is split, its integrity opened to the vacillations of external context.

The element responsible for and in the same time part of the topography of the Gothic narrative, language**,** offers a multiplicity of readings, each of them speaking of the split-sign, about the blurred demarcation line between life and death, about a type of hostility that seems incomprehensible, vicious and universal. Language as monstrous continues to promote ontological uncertainty, a verbal self-fragmentation, the monster's narrative revealing that self is mastered through language and the hegemonic forms rooted in it. Concerned as it is with questions of identity, ontological security, and the cultural and psychological boundaries of self-representation, the Gothic novel became the literary form the most appropriate to explore and unmask the limited and limiting ontology of *Paradise Lost*.

2.c Gothic Atmosphere – "Knowledge would be fatal. It is the uncertainty that charms me. A mist makes things wonderful."(Wilde, 1994, 236).

Language creates atmosphere (that could be "agreeable" or not) which is that hierarchical set of features expected by the reader in a certain spatial-temporal circumscribed universe. Even if this atmosphere anticipated by the receiver is "disagreeable", producing unpleasant connotations, its absence generates feelings of frustration. (Neţ, 199, 17)

Ever since Horace Walpole established the link between architecture and literature, representation of the labyrinthine and claustrophobic space associated with Gothic architecture has been the defining convention of the Gothic fiction. This architectural space is integral to the psychological machinations of Gothic fiction, and is used in order to invoke feelings of fear, awe, entrapment and helplessness in characters and readers alike. The fear can be said to emanate from a vertiginous excess of meaning. The Gothic refers to an ornamental excess, a rhetorical extravagance, the multiple interpretations embedded in the text becoming part of the experience of horror that comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot.

Beside the landscape and setting that can be sometimes regarded as essentially a cosmetic, even decorative aspect of the Gothic fiction, the most central characteristic of the genre is the hero-villain himself. Of the characterizing features distinguishable in the archetypal Gothic villain, the power is by far the basic trait. The Gothic hero-villain is usually characterized as a profoundly enigmatic figure. The Gothic novelist traditionally feeds the reader with tantalizing bits of information

designed to invest his villain with a sinister, darkly charismatic identity. Dracula, Van Helsingr reflects, was once the cleverest as well the bravest of men, a noble individual with a mighty brain and an iron resolution. It is this wilful perversion of extraordinary personal ability that is instrumental in creating the terror and awe associated with both the Gothic villain, and the genre itself

Gothic castle is a key element of temporality, becoming what Bakhtin calls a chronotope, the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and special relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. In the chronotope time becomes artistically visible, it takes on flesh. In the same manner, space grows charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. As Albright underlines, beyond interpretations such as those that invest it with the meaning of the body or of an oppressive, enclosing, patriarchal space, the castle can be viewed as a trope of time. He places emphasis on the idea of the castle as a figure of antiquity and sublimity quoting from Archibald Alison's *Essay on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, who notes that the Gothic castle is still more sublime than other forms of architecture, as, besides the desolation of time, it also seems to have withstood the assaults of war. (Allbright, Richard, 2005). Such a castle is therefore the material, and consequently, the spatial inscription of time. It is to be considered in its relation to the pair past / present, and to the tension between them, as revealed by the preoccupation with ruins in art, architecture, and landscape. Ian P. Watt considers the relation between the historical past and the time of one's own experience as being embodied through the presence of the castle, which is a witness of generational succession: "in the Gothic novel, the castle becomes connected with the family because it is essentially the material survivor of a powerful lineage, a symbol of the continuing life of its founder.(Ibidem, 163)"

At the heart of the fin de siècle texts the castle is replaced; the city becomes the primary Gothic landscape and the scientist is the primary figure. Within such a background many of the forms of the nineteenth-century materialist science attempted to provide tools for identifying and categorizing what was decadent, criminal, abnormal within human nature. Yet science did not just offer reassuring ways of categorizing and ordering, of locating and fixing lines of difference – there was also a transgressive and disruptive force. The scientists are often shown dealing with forces that are better left alone. As Glennis Byron argues, "what the scientist tends more and more to dabble with is the mind." (Byron, 135) Dabbling in science is a cause of dangerous splitting, the texts also suggesting that the repressive forces of society are equally responsible. As the physical location of Gothic shifts from wild landscape to savage city, so the source of threat is no longer always located directly within the marginal groups, the poor and the criminal classes, as it is in the works of the social reformers.(Ibidem, 137) Rather than allowing the darkness to be projected on other cultures, the Gothic novels of the Victorian fin de siècle very often suggest that the evil is "sinuously curled" around the very heart of the respectable middle-class norm.

The techniques of destabilization and excess combined with the tendency to anchor fiction in reality have as main function that of creating an atmosphere of unease that is directly conducive to the "Gothic" mood of fearful suspense. The alternation of static, sometimes moralizing passages with scenes of often hectic action results in an unstable form of writing – and reading, in the same time.

We can state that a central poised instability is central to the establishment of the Gothic mood, to its fear and delight that make up the ambiguity of the novel. The stylistic instability is realised through fragmentation, interruption and exaggeration. The distinct narratives tell parts of the same story, interrupted and resumed in order to prepare the necessary mood for the climax, the overwhelming sense of mystery and dread.

The achievement of stabilization, or closure, in the novel becomes a curiously two-sided enterprise: desired because of its connections with resolution and the conquest of good over evil, it can nonetheless be seen as an inadequate, or unrealistic, response to the pressures of passion and vice.

2.d. Gothic aesthetics

The Gothic fiction presents a certain amount of stock features which disseminate across texts and historical periods embodying and evoking cultural anxieties. Therefore, we may view Gothic as a hybrid form including and converting both other literary forms and its own rules according to different aesthetic trends.

The acceptation of the classical Gothic is be that of a genre comprised of texts considered "popular" that practice narrative innovation despite the frequent use of certain repetitive plot elements, that use sensationalist and suspenseful plotting, that present supernatural or quasi-supernatural phenomena or elements illustrating a more or less antagonistic relation to realist literary practice. Such novels attempt to arouse a strong affective response in the reader offering extreme representations of human identities against backgrounds of insanity, hysteria, delusion, and alternate mental states in general.

Horace Walpole attempts to evoke emotional agitation by means of theatrical gestures and movements, but his mind tries to work from the outside in and he succeeds only in putting his characters through frantic exercises which have no correspondence with the pace of human emotion.

As far as the technique of disorientation is concerned, rapidity of movement, traditionally connected with magic and often associated with the sublime, is often used to evoke the presence of supernatural agents (as in the carriage ride of Raymond and the Bleeding Nun in *The Monk*), or simply to unseat the reader from the normal rhythms of his world.(Napier, 53) One senses a deliberate acceleration of pace in *Otranto*: "Never is the reader's attention relaxed. The rules of the drama are almost observed throughout the conduct of the piece." (Napier, 53). Far from lightening the impact of the story, as Hume argued, this hectic pace of emotions and events lends an ominously anarchical quality to the narrative. The author appears reluctant to pause to analyse specific scenes or to relate characters' responses to a total emotional range. As Elizabeth Napier underlines, one should pay attention to interruption and fragmentation as devices to curtail length and move the story forward to create the general atmosphere of unease that characterizes the Gothic. Both Walpole and Radcliffe use the procedure. If in the *Castle of Otranto* Walpole uses interruption to "jar the reader or to tantalize him with information known but not immediately

divulged", Ann Radcliffe uses interruption to attenuate, not to shorten the narrative, "often withholding information for chapters at a time, prolonging a lingering (and sometimes nearly forgotten) sense of mystery and dread. The mystery of the veil in *Udolpho* is a well-known instance of this technique, as is the enigma of St. Aubert's relationship to the Marchioness de Villeroi."(Napier, 56). Napier rightfully views Walpole's acts of restraining or interrupting more abrupt than those of Radcliffe, his scenes taking on a rhythm of "wrenching and foreshortening remarkably akin to that of comic strip." (Ibidem)

Of a special interest in the Gothic novels is the theme of concealment and revelation. Elizabeth P. Broadwell underlines the fact that in order to carry this theme, Radcliffe often makes use of the veil image. If in the case of her first novel, *The Castle of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789) the veil image appears only casually and is not part of the overall meaning, while in her two subsequent novels, *The Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *The Romance of the Forest* (1792) the heroines can marry only after the "veils" are torn away (the mysteries are solved). (Broadwell, 1975, 32) As something that conceals or hides, the veil is often used to disguise. Characters disguise, they wear garments to disguise objects they carry. Significantly, the verb "to reveal" ("re-veil") may have two different meanings: (1) to cover again with a veil, in the sense of, once again, drawing the veil over oneself, or (2) to pull back the veil in the sense of unveiling oneself. Taking into consideration this double meaning, and also Judith Halberstam's view on the connotations of dress and disguise (Ibidem, 59), one can say that the entire plot of the Radcliffean novel depends on the interpretations of the meanings. The structure of the novels depends on the characters' revealing themselves – in the sense of masking or veiling themselves again and again – until, towards the end of the novels, they reveal themselves – in the sense that they are unveiled and the mysteries disclosed.

Of the elements that appear in Radcliffe's novels and are used as a veil that disguises something, one can mention nature (darkness acts like a veil). Time is again a veil that removes an experience further and further from us. Radfcliffe's heroines are made happy only after rendering all the "veils."

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick considers the veil in relation to the duality surface / depth. Her analysis of the thematic surface is meant to challenge the traditional view of the Gothic contribution to characterization and figuration in fiction. Referring to the images of depth and interiority in Gothic fiction she asserts that "the units of this model are often not coterminous with the fictional 'selves' in the novels, nor does the model necessarily demarcate areas that are qualitatively, affectively, or atmospherically different from each other." (Kosofsky, 1986, 12) She stresses the thoroughly Gothic convention that "pairs an elaboration of the 'surface' with 'sexual content.'" (ibidem, 225) The veil and the surface are linked metonymically, by touch, both of them appearing marked with blood. The veil that conceals sexuality is a constant presence in *The Monk* as in other Gothic novels as well, appearing both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified. A quite open sexual connotation appears in the scene when Ambrosio is seduced by a younger monk who "reveals" that "he" is a woman, a scene pointing at the duality veil / veiled (where the latter clearly subordinates the former in terms of sexual charge).

The theme of the double had long been associated with the Gothic novel and just four years before *Dorian Gray* was published there appeared the classic novel of the double life, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Another Gothic convention more suitably exploited by Oscar Wilde is that of transgression. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is considered to combine this theme with that of self-development, the latter being a precondition of the former.(Clausson, 2003, 23) The Gothic exploration of a space that presents phenomena at the borders of human identity and culture – insanity, criminality, sexual perversion – coincides with Oscar Wilde's anti-authoritarian view.

A component of the Gothic aesthetic worth mentioning is the idea of gap, defined as a word that signifies a breach. On a physical level it may be in a hedge or wall, or, on a larger scale, through strata, as in a gorge or pass. In this sense it takes its meaning ultimately from the Old Norse "gapa" (MHG gaffen): a chasm or abyss. Because, too, such breaches occur through almost every stage of the sentiment of the lived, the word comes to take on its more general range of meanings: signifying an unfulfilled space or interval, a blank, a break in continuity." (Johnson, 1995, 9) Joseph Frank pointed out that the idea of gap enjoyed a special and explicit status in the Gothic novel from its very inception in English culture – "an almost unprecedented deliberacy about the breaks and discontinuities in the form, an implicit self-consciousness which was, in itself, something of a generic indicator" (Joseph, 1945, 658)..

In charting a topography of Gothic the spatial relations bear on the tropes of inside and outside, live burial, and the unspeakable in Gothic. Gothic, then, according to Sedgwick, is marked by a doubleness of space created violently by the destruction of boundaries. One space (inside, silence, nightmare) encroaches or feeds upon another (outside, speech, experience) as the difficulty of telling becomes a part of the act of confession. Language performs the operations of the uncanny so that the unspeakable is buried alive within the speakable, one story lies buried in another, one history produces and buries others.

Through language the Gothic heroes embody Julia Kristeva's sense of the abject: "The abject lies, beyond themes, in the way one speaks; it is verbal communication, it is the Word that discloses the abject."(Kristeva, 1982, 23). Abjection is above all ambiguity: while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from threatens it; quite the reverse, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. And it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what perturbs identity, system, order: the in-between, the equivocal. (Joseph, 1945m 658). Imprecision and extremes to which the Gothic has been subjected critically are in part a result of instability and cross-purposes in the form itself. The genre does achieve stability by repeating a certain pattern of accepted conventions but this should not make us forget the fact that the Gothic, in its development, is formally and stylistically marked by disequilibrium.

3. Conclusions

Fred Botting considers that the main features of Gothic fiction, in neoclassical terms, are heterotopias, as the ruined castles and abbeys, the dark labyrinths, the wild landscapes, the supernatural events, etc. are not only excluded from the Augustan social world but introduce the passions, the unbridled, appetitive consumption, the desires and excitements it suppressed. This type of heterotopic mirror exists in reality with visible effects, states Foucault: "it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy."(Kristeva, 521) This mirror, explains the French writer in "Of other spaces" (*Diacritics,* p. 24) "makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through the virtual point which is over there." (Kristeva, 521) The eighteenth century is therefore dominated by the disturbance of boundaries between appropriate reality and fantastic romantic identification. This mixture of romance and mimesis – or realistic and fanciful representations – represented the basis of Walpole's amalgamation of the ancient and the modern in which the former was nothing but imagination and unlikeliness, while the latter imitated nature, fiction itself, as much as the landscapes and cultures it represents, operating in the manner of a heterotopia – Walpole deliberately transports eighteenth century scenes and figures into seductive romantic worlds. As a concluding remark regarding the heterotopic mirror, one may state that it does not only distort the proper perception of the relation between present and past, but it also introduces a divergent reflection in which the Gothic marks a discontinuity between political and aesthetic versions of history.

One of the essential features of the Gothic is its habit of distortion, as if looking through a badly made window, and this presumably could be seen as reflecting the distance between various classes and social groups. The Gothic was and remained the dimension of the imperfectly perceived. More than this, one is never less alone than in sites as a monastic cell or a chamber in a castle (which are emphatically impressed with a sense of communal relations), especially when one comes to recognize that seclusion is always doubtful. One can never be sure that rooms do not have a secret access invisible to the closest inspection, yet accessible to unknown others on the outside. One can never be safe from others' eyes, ears, hands, or general influence.

The Gothic leaves one with the feeling that maybe if one thing didn't happen none of theses terrible things would happen. It is that wrong turn, the chance to turn back or the lack of the characters to realize the eminent danger of their actions that ultimately always bring them to their doom. The stock features belonging to the Gothic novel are embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties. These anxieties vary according to the changes occurring in the evolution (or involution) of the society: political revolution, urbanization, scientific discovery etc. The greatness of the Gothic is not that it plays with terror and insanity, but rather that it plays with all these things, that it imagines them.

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