

The Victorian Gothic Short Story
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Lecture – 01
THE GOTHIC - Literary Genre

Hello. Welcome to this course on the Victorian Gothic Short Story. In this introductory lecture, I would like to give you some pointers about the Gothic Literary Genre.

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The slide is titled "Gothic" and features a horizontal bar with an orange segment on the left and a blue segment on the right. Below the bar, there is a list of three items, each preceded by a small square icon:

- Literary genre
- Kind of texts
- Characteristics, motifs

In the center of the slide is a blue circle containing the following text:

"Strange or
perverse"
"Illegitimate";

Below the slide content is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt, speaking.


It is a very popular literary genre and the gothic means a particular kind of text. These texts have identifiable characteristics and motifs and the very word gothic would make us imagine strange or even perverse settings and stories and the subject matter is more illegitimate rather than legitimate. So, these are some of the defining ideas of gothic literature.

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"Gothic family"

- Novels
- Poems
- Plays
- Films


- Music
- Videogames
- Opera
- comics
- Fashion




The "Gothic family" has a list of genres within it. So, the gothic does not only include the novels, it also includes poems, plays, films, music, video games, opera, comics and fashion and the gothic is popular to this day. It is a term which we derived from the medieval world, but which continues to be very popular with the public till this point of time and all these wide array of generic narratives and visual items a very recognizable set of attributes which I will discuss in this lecture.

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Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto (1764)



- First use of the term "gothic story"
- "barbarous"
- "Middle Ages"



The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole, which was published in 1764 has the first reference to the term “gothic story”. What do we mean by the gothic story? It is firstly, “barbarous” and secondly, it is derived from the “Middle Ages”. So, these two qualities are usually associated with the gothic. So, we are told to understand something which is less sophisticated and which is ancient. These two primary attributes are usually associated with the gothic narrative.

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The Monk by Lewis is another very famous work of gothic fiction and you can see it's lengthy title that image that you have. So, we have the picture and we have the extended title. If you look very closely, it is a very interesting title which also tells the readers about the contents of the text. So, The Monk is a romance in which is depicted the wonderful adventures of Ambrosio. Look at the title character. Ambrosio is a very interesting Catholic name. He is a friar of the order of the Capuchins who was diverted from the track of virtue by the artifice of a Female Demon and the word Demon at once tells us that this is a work which has supernatural elements in it.

So, the presence of the supernatural is also one of the features of the gothic. Let me continue reading the title here. So, this monk Ambrosio is being diverted from the path of virtue by this Female Demon that entered his monastery disguised as a novice and after seducing him from his Vow Of Celibacy presented him with a branch of enchanted myrtle. So, there is also a seduction and we can see how the virtuous Ambrosio is being

kind of diverted from his avowed vocation into something that is not very legitimate, that is something very sinful.

And look at the enchanted myrtle. So, we have magic here and what is the purpose of this branch of enchanted myrtle-- to obtain the person of the beautiful Antonio of Madrid. So, we have a beautiful possibly vulnerable figure. Antonio, how he was discovered in her chamber, by her mother whom he murdered. So, there is murder here.

So, look at the number of items which are being highlighted in the title of these particular gothic novels. We have Demons; we have Friars; we have enchantment; we have vulnerable but beautiful maidens, we have murder here and let's read further, her mother whom he murdered to keep his crime a secret and the particulars of the means by which he caused the body of Antonio to be conveyed in a sleep to the dreary walls of his own convent.

So, look at the way in which this vulnerable, but beautiful Antonio is made unconscious and then, kind of kidnapped or abducted to the vaults-- the underground cellars—of his own convent. So, the convent becomes a very complicated space. A space which can house abducted beautiful women-- where he accomplishes wicked machinations on the on the innocent virgin whom he then assassinates with a dagger. So, there is sexual assault, and then there is assassination and look at the way the dagger comes to him. This dagger is presented to him by his attendant fiend who afterward betrays him to the judges of the inquisition.

So, the fiend, the devil plays a role in trapping this once virtuous friar and how this man falls into a trap and is judged by the inquisition-- the body which tries him for his guilt-- in the dungeons in which he is confined and suffers tortures and how to escape from thence, he assigns over his soul and body to the devil. You can clearly see how this friar is imprisoned by the inquisition and how he tries to escape his imprisonment by signing over his body and sold to the devil, to satan himself, who again deceives him and inflicts the most ignominious death.

So, eventually he gets shameful death. Look at the title. This is one lengthy title and in this title you will understand the key features of the gothic. So, in a microcosm you can pick out the number of key players which come up in a gothic narrative. The setting is a catholic convent and the usual villains are friars, we have victims in the form of beautiful

women who are assaulted and murdered and we have fiends or demons trapping these once virtuous members of the clergy and then finally, these men are killed by the devil himself.

So, this body of work is clearly illegitimate. You can see that all the subjects which are not dealt with in other kinds of fiction are discussed in detail here. So, the title page is a good forerunner of the things to come in the body of work, in the body of literature that we call the gothic.

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Gothic

- Supernatural ✓
- Promise of the supernatural
- "Discovery" of some "mysterious element" from the past

Ghosts or the suggestion of ghosts.

Antiquity is unearthed

So, we can surmise from the title page that the supernatural plays a key role in gothic literature. So, either we have the supernatural per se, we have figures such as demon, Satan and other magical creatures or we have the promise of the supernatural. That is even though the supernatural may not be present in a concrete manner, there are suggestions of the supernatural in the gothic work.

So, these are the two sides of the same coin either the presence of the supernatural or the promise of the supernatural; either ghost or the suggestion of ghosts and this latter thing may or may not turn out to be true. So, which is why I used the word suggestion and we also have some kind of discovery or some mysterious element from the past.

So, antiquity is unearthed; unearthed meaning discovered. There is some kind of you know discovery or some element or figure from the past in the present.


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Setting

- Strange place
- Mysterious
- Threatening: a prison

Remote landscapes
"somewhere other"

British home
Arctic wastes → Frankenstein
Norm → setting?



Setting is a very important characteristic of gothic fiction. If you go back to that title page from *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis, we saw that the catholic convent plays a major presence in the gothic novel there, but usually the setting of gothic fiction is very strange. It is very mysterious and it is threatening and it acts as a prison.

So, the strange place could be you the arctic wastes, which we have in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It could be a convent, it could be some haunted castle. So, we have remote landscapes and these settings become the other; it is somewhere other to the norm that is what we need to remember. What is the norm in terms of setting? What is acceptable? What is ordinary? The acceptable and the ordinary could be Britain. It could be London. It could be a country house and the rest could be the other which can house strange mysterious events.


So, the norm is usually the British home and the supernatural could be set in locations which are other than this British norm in terms of the domestic space and the setting in a gothic fiction is usually a prison to its protagonist. It becomes a terrifying space from which the protagonist wants to escape. So, the other is a prison and the norm could be your home and then, home of the British protagonist, the English protagonist.

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The Gothic

- Vulnerable heroines
- "Frightening" locales
- Sexually enticing

Victimized women
Vulnerable young men
"tweaked"



So, who are some of the protagonists of the gothic fiction? We have vulnerable heroines, if you go back to *The Monk* again, we have Antonio the vulnerable maiden who is assaulted and assassinated. So, she is one of the key identifiable protagonists of gothic fiction. Gothic fiction is full of victimized women usually but if you look at the gothic stories that are on this particular course, we have vulnerable young men as the protagonists.

I can give you some examples in HG Wells, we have the young skeptic who does not want to believe in the haunted nature of the red room. So, he is a perfect example of the vulnerability that kind of envelopes the central characters in the gothic fiction. We have Englishmen such as the narrator in Kipling's *My Own True Ghost Story*, who is again in a vulnerable position because he thinks that he is occupying a space which is very close to a haunted room.

So, instead of young women as victims, we have men as victims in the stories that I have assigned on the course and we are looking at Victorian short stories and the gothic features are tweaked a bit. I mean they are kind of adjusted, modified, adapted to suit the needs of the Victorian period, late Victorian period, where I have chosen the stories for us to study and analyze. So, though the stereotype that we have is the presence of vulnerable heroines, here we have men who are under attack in the short stories that are on study for this course.

The locales in gothic fiction are frightening. Be it the gothic from the late 18th century or early 19th century or late 19th century, the locations are frightening or scary and not only are they frightening, there is some kind of sexual enticement which is also associated with the settings. If you go back to The Monk title that I read out in detail, you can see how a very beautiful young woman is kidnapped, abducted by the friar and shut up in the vaults or the cellars of his convent to suit his purposes.

So, you can see the connection between frightening cellars or walls and their connection to a sexual assault. So, the gothic has very very horrifying settings and violent behavior on the part of the perpetrators.

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Dracula (1897)

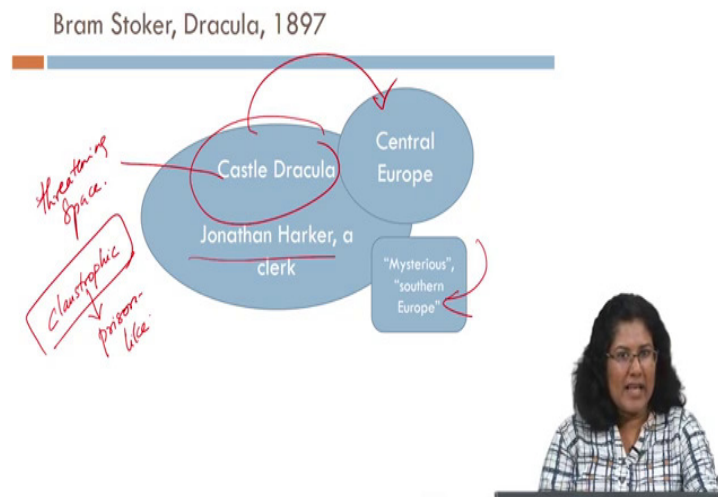


late Gothic



I am now showing an image from Dracula which was published in 1897 written by Bram Stoker. So, this is late gothic.

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In Dracula, we have the castle of Dracula as the frightening space- the threatening space. And this castle is set in Central Europe, but usually in gothic fiction and the mysterious locations are in “Southern Europe” in marginal spaces and threatening spaces. In Dracula, we have Jonathan Harker, a very young clerk, a legal clerk who is trapped in the castle of Dracula. So, you can see how claustrophobic the setting becomes and the prison like atmosphere is a very common kind of setting that we come across in the gothic.

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We can also have frightening spaces within the world of Great Britain or within the world of London itself. So, for example, we have in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens the Satis House becoming a space which is very threatening, which is hostile to the central protagonist. Satis house is a decaying mansion, it is a middle class space. But since it is a kind of adapted to suit the eerie nature of its occupant, it becomes a symbol of all that is threatening and horrible and not very conducive to domestic harmony. So, we have in Satis house Miss Havisham, the aging spinster who seems to have frozen time in her house. At that particular moment, when she realizes that her engagement is broken and her wedding is not going to go ahead.

So, all time seems to stop at that particular moment and she has this decaying cake in the dining hall and again, this space becomes the gothic space in *Great Expectations* and Pip the young protagonist about whom the story is written is terrified to find himself in the company of Miss Havisham. What we need to understand in relation to the setting is that there is no one particular geographical location that becomes gothic. Any space can become gothic, if it becomes uncanny if it is not home, if the domestic space is turned upside down that space becomes very very gothic in tone. So, London can become a gothic space, if its domestic city is turned upside down or turned inside out.

So, we have gothic worlds in Dickens. So, we need to remember that and not uniformly think that London means good, Catholic pockets in the world would mean bad or a worlds which are not Great Britain, would mean that they are evil. So, even within the home, there are spaces which can become supernatural and hostile in tone and in mood for the central protagonist.

So, we need to figure out why these gothic spaces come about and what is their function in the story.

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Gothic


- Moments of Transition
- Medieval to Renaissance
- Affinity as well as opposition—very ancient and very modern

17th to 18th C

disjunctions in societal changes

Past returns with a "vengeance"

Gothic work



When do we have gothic literature? According to critics such as John Bevan, who suggests that gothic comes about in moments of transition when society is moving from one ideology or one kind of production into a different kind. So, moments of transition would mean ruptures or would mean disjunctions. They would mean shifts. So, all these shifts in the way the society is run in a usual way would mean that contradictions might come about and these contradictions are played out in works which are gothic in tone.

So, moments of transition for example, from the 17th to the 18th century is a period or the late 18th to 19th century is a period which was fertile in terms of works which were produced in a gothic mode. So, we had transitions from medieval to the renaissance. So, at that particular point of time too the gothic mode was popular; so, we need to remember that disjunctions in societal changes would bring about all these kinds of literary modes. And in terms of the shift in society, there is also affinity in addition to opposition.

So, we need not always think that the gothic is in opposition to the modern. The gothic, which would mean that it is more medieval, just more ancient than modern, has paradoxically, an affinity to the modern as well. In other words, gothic has a love hate relationship with the modern or the modernity that is coming up. So, the very ancient, and the very modern aspects of society can exist coexist in a gothic work.

So, the very ancient and very modern can be found in gothic fiction or gothic work and the gothic itself is in some sense, the return of the past. So, the critics would suggest that the past, the ancient, the antique world returns with a vengeance in the modern of the contemporary world in which that work was written. So, there is past as well as present, the rupture of the past into the surface of the present is a feature of the gothic.

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Sigmund Freud

□ 'The Uncanny' (1919): 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'.

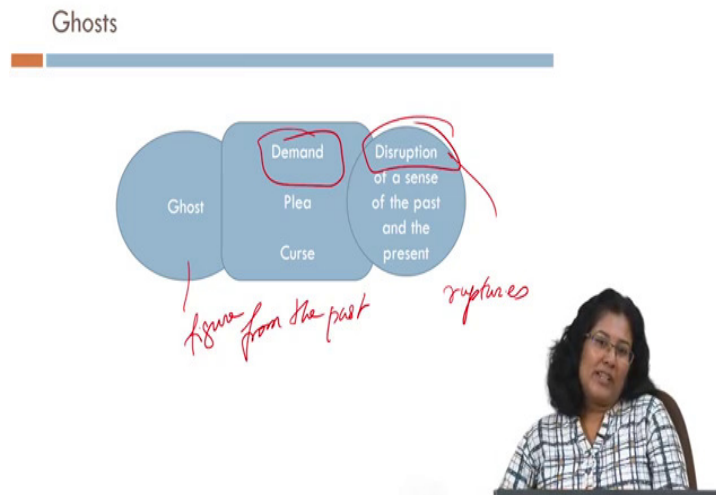
Satis House

Now, let us look at the idea of 'The Uncanny' which was proposed by Sigmund Freud, he wrote in his essay 'The Uncanny' in 1919 'that it is a class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'. So, in other words, the uncanny is making unfamiliar the familiar. The familiar looks unfamiliar and it is deeply frightening as well. That is what the uncanny is all about.

So, for example, if you go back to that example from Great Expectations, Satis house is a home, a middle class home which is identifiable, but at the same time the way it is furnished, the way it is arranged makes it unfamiliar. This is not ordinary. This is not the common interior of a middle class home because it is all frozen in time to that particular wedding day of Miss Havisham which did not happen according to plan.

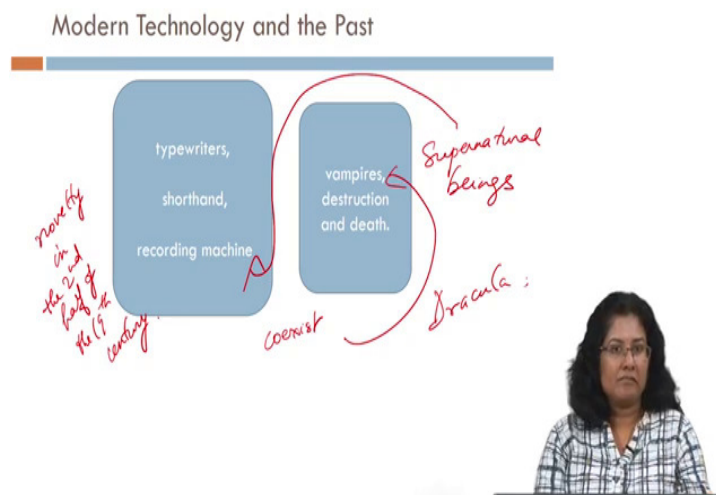
So, once the familiar becomes unfamiliar, we have the frightening as the outcome. That is one very good example of the uncanny in literature and this uncanny is deployed to great effect in gothic works.

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The ghosts are very common presence in some gothic fiction. So, what is the agenda or the function of a ghost in such works? The ghost has a demand, it has a particular demand that it asks of its protagonist or it has a plea. It has some kind of request to make or the ghost has a cost to offer to some of the figures in the work of literature. So, the ghost has these functions. In other words, the ghost is a figure from the past.

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And it disrupts, it ruptures the smooth functioning of the present. I am reminded here of the ghost of Hamlet's father in Shakespeare's Hamlet. So, that is a very good example to

give you an idea what the ghost is performing in that particular work. If you remember the plea that the ghost of Hamlet's father comes to his son with-- a particular demand and a plea about avenging his murder.

So, Hamlet who is going about his work is disrupted, he is kind of shaken from the present and he is taken back into a face of the past and he is motivated to sort it out. So, you can see how the present is ruined; in some sense, how the present is a kind of destabilized by the requests or the demands or the causes of triggers from the past. If you remember, I just mentioned a while ago how the past and the present can coexist in a gothic work and here, I have a set of details which will prove that case. Typewriters, shorthand, recording machines were a novelty in the second half of the 19th century.

And these inventions and discoveries could co-exist with vampires, destruction and deaths of vampires or supernatural beings and you can see how the supernatural could co-exist with the recording machine. So, this co-existence of two contradictory sets of beings and objects happens in Dracula by Bram Stoker.

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Gothic

- Sexual difference
- the exploration of questions of sexual desire, pleasure, power and pain.
- the erotic, illegitimate or transgressive sexuality, perversion, obsession, voyeurism and sexual violence.
- At times, as in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Gothic can come close to pornography.

Handwritten annotations:
- "gender roles" written in red above the first two bullet points.
- "not discussed in mainstream narratives" written in red below the list.
- "Realistic fiction" written in red in a box below the list.

Now, let us look at some of the key ideological aspects of the gothic plot. The gothic plot is obsessed with sexual difference or gender difference. It is highly concerned with the exploration of questions of sexual desire, pleasure, power and pain. These are some of the key themes of gothic fiction and power is a very important aspect because all these--

desire, pleasure and pain-- could relate to this idea of power. The enjoyment of power would mean all the other aspects that I have just mentioned.

So, gothic fiction is worried about or obsessed with power and gender. It is also full of the erotic, the illegitimate, that which transgresses sexuality, perversion, obsession, voyeurism and sexual violence and you need to remember that these subjects are not discussed in mainstream fiction, in mainstream narratives.

For example, in 19th century realist work, we do not usually get a discussion or an exploration of all these subjects; not in the way it is dealt with in gothic work. For example, at times in Matthew Lewis's *Monk* 1796, the gothic can come close to pornography. So, you can see the mode in which this particular gothic narrative deals with the marginal- the marginal affairs and the illegitimate affairs of society. This literary work gets that space to discuss subjects which are marginalized or laid aside by the mainstream narrative body.

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Terror versus Horror

Ann Radcliffe

- Terror...could be morally uplifting.
- It does not show horrific things explicitly but only suggests them.
- 'expands the soul' of the readers
- more alert to the possibility of things beyond the possibility of the everyday



Now, we have two ideas called the terror and horror in relation to the gothic and we have Ann Radcliffe, one of the practitioners of gothic fiction, who tries to differentiate between the two. She tries to discriminate between the two and define both these qualities and she writes that terror is a good thing. Terror could be morally uplifting, it can lift the spirit of the readers. It has a good function to perform and terror, descriptions of terror, does not show horrific things explicitly. But it is only suggestive of them. So,

there is a suggestion of bad things not a description of it in terror and she believes that terror can expand the soul of the readers, it can broaden uh the mind and spirit of the readers.

Because it can make them alert to the possibility of things beyond the possibility of the everyday; so, it can alert the readers to the presence of extraordinary things; things beyond reason, beyond knowledge for the benefit of the reader. So, this is what terror is all about and it is starkly different to the idea of the horror.


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Horror according to Radcliffe

- Horror: 'freezes and nearly annihilates' the senses of its readers
- it shows atrocious things too explicitly.
- morally dangerous
- wrong kind of excitement in the reader.

destroy.

Possibility of sexual assault versus description of sexual assault




So, what is horror? Horror according to Radcliffe 'freezes and nearly annihilates' the senses of its readers. What as the word annihilate mean? Annihilate means destroy. So, horror is bad because it kind of immobilizes the senses of the readers. In fact, it shows atrocious things too explicitly and here you can think about the work The Monk by Matthew Lewis because there is a kind of a description of various kinds of assault in an explicit manner.

Therefore, this kind of writing, the writing about horror is morally dangerous to the readers and because it brings up a wrong kind of excitement in the reader. So, horror is bad because it damages the senses of the reading public. A good example of horror is not just the possibility or the suggestion of sexual assault but in fact, the description of it and again think of The Monk.

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Terror versus Horror	
Terror	Horror
<input type="checkbox"/> Morally good ✓	<input type="checkbox"/> Morally bad ✓
<input type="checkbox"/> Psychological experience of fear	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on the horrific object
<input type="checkbox"/> Limitations of human experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Damaging, limiting, to the mind ✓



Now, I have kind of differentiated the two into two columns; terror on the one side and horror on the other. So, terror is morally good and horror is morally bad and in uh terror we have a psychological experience of fear. There is a kind of an experience of fear in the senses; whereas, in horror, we have a focus on the horrific subject here or the horrific object. So, the object itself is given a very close view for the benefit of the readers and that would be damaging, limiting, to the mind of the readers.

So, it would kind of destabilize the equanimity of the reader; whereas, terror can offer a an understanding of the limitations of human experience. The reader would know that the human experience cannot completely understand each and every aspect of the world around them. There are things that are beyond the human purview and that is indicated by terror.

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The Gothic

- Doubt about supernatural/spiritual
- Possibility about world beyond reason and knowledge
- Rational explanations; Eg. Radcliffe
- Appearance of supernatural; Eg. Lewis' The Monk



The function of the gothic is to cast doubt about the supernatural on the one hand and it can also question, it can also rationalize certain suggested supernatural aspects and the function of the gothic is to again, suggest the possibility about a world beyond reason or and knowledge and it can also as I said explain away rationally the presence of certain apparently or allegedly supernatural stuff.

So, Radcliffe is a good example of this kind of writer who explains away certain alleged supernatural stuff by her rational explanations and if you think about Lewis's Monk, the supernatural is present- very much present. You can think about Satan who is present in that work. So, we have two different categories here; one which reinforces supernatural and the other which kind of explains or destroys or deconstructs the supernatural.

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So, this is the bibliography.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in my next session.