

The Popular Gothic Novel
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Week – 1 Lecture – 1B
Gothic Elements; Gothic Sublime

Hello, and welcome to today's lecture on the Popular Gothic Novel. In today's lecture we are going to talk about Gothic Elements, it is a subject I am continuing from the previous lecture and we will also touch up concepts of the Gothic Sublime.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:31)

Gothic Genre and its Elements



- ‘* a castle, ruined or intact, haunted or not (nowadays a Victorian or New England house),
- ruined buildings which are sinister or which arouse a pleasing melancholy’

Source: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/gothic.hnd.pdf



Now, what are some of the key elements of the Gothic genre? The Gothic novel brings to mind a big castle, so it is usually ruined or haunted, it may have supernatural presence inside it, it is either haunted or it need not be haunted but it may contain an evil lord as its master. And the castle could also be a big mansion, a feudal manor or a house and it could have some kind of sinister happenings inside it.

Somebody could be imprisoned in secret, remember Jane Eyre in which we know that Bertha Mason, the first wife of Rochester, the mad wife was hidden in the attic, so that Victorian Manor house also has sinister, subtext to it and therefore it can be set to be in the Gothic mode, but sometimes the house need not be haunted or it need not have an evil lord in it but sometimes the

ruins, and the ruined buildings can arouse a pleasing melancholy. So these are some of the characteristics in terms of the setting of the Gothic narrative.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:17)

Gothic Ruins of Kenilworth



- 'an indignation against the tyranny of those wretched times' and foster 'a generous pleasure in the happiness we enjoy under a juster and more equal government.'
- 'The picturesque and evocative ruin is a common theme in Gothic literature. This image shows the ruins of [Kenilworth Castle](#)'.

Source: Richard Hurd's Dialogue on the Age of Queen Elizabeth, Moral and Political Dialogues (1760)



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_fiction



Now, I want to introduce to you a castle called Kenilworth castle and if you look at that image on the slide, it is a beautiful, it is evocative, it is picturesque, it is very pretty and as I pointed out a little while ago being picturesque is also a part of the Gothic mode, the Gothic element and this castle, Kenilworth castle arouses such a pleasing feelings in the minds of the viewer.

Now, if you look at another perspective associated with the Kenilworth castle, we have one such contrary opinion present in the work of Richard Hurd and he suggest that when you look at such a building, such a ruined building, such institution, we are reminded of those wretched times, the evil times, so the indignation apparently is rot in the mind of the person viewing it and we think back to those evil times and contrast those evil moments in history with the present, the present being a pleasure to be in, it is a generous pleasure because the people are under a juster and more equal government.

So this is an important point I think when we look at Gothic edifice or Gothic narratives in themselves because while we are enjoying the ruins, it could be a ruined castle, it could be a ruined Tudor manor, it could be a feudal structure like the one we find in Jane Eyre. We are

subconsciously contrasting that moment, that uncomfortable, the curious moment with the present where we are more comfortable and are secure.

So, the past and the present are subconsciously contrasted in the minds of the reader and that is one of the functions of the Gothic fiction I would think, so the past is brought in for examination and the readers are subconsciously told that that this is a better time to live in.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:59)

Gothic Genre and its Elements



- * dungeons, underground passages, crypts,
- and catacombs which, in modern houses, become spooky basements or attics,
- * labyrinths, dark corridors, and winding stairs

Source: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/gothic.html.pdf
Staircase image: https://www.google.com/search?q=Gothic+labyrinths,+corridors+trilith+library&client=firefox-b-d&source=lmms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjnvt1g4DpABkXA4M8HQk1A_YC_AUoAoeCAQAw&biw=911&bih=436&imgre=lc0qobV_4GKOM



Now, further Gothic elements would include dungeons, underground cellars, underground passages, crypts, hidden rooms and hidden passages, hidden spaces, bodies buried in crypts can also have sinister overtones because there might be hauntings in that space and catacombs which, in modern houses can become spooky, scary basements and attics can also be part and parcel of the paraphernalia of the Gothic narrative and of course, there are these labyrinths which are referred to in the previous lecture, mazes, confusing passages in which one could get lost.

If you think about some of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, the American writer, he also makes use of such passages, labyrinth and passages in his spooky short stories to create that Gothic terror in the mind of person who is in the passage as well as on the mind of the reader who is kind of reading that experience, of course, we are not focusing on the American Gothic in this

course. I am looking purely at the British Gothic, particular the Gothic of the late 18th and the 19th centuries.

So, labyrinths, dark corridors and winding stairs, spiral staircases and if you remember my other course called the Victorian Gothic Short Story, we read a story called H. G. Wells' The Red Room where many of these elements, dark corridors, winding stairs are all present in that Gothic tale and the popular Gothic novel kind of expands on all these Gothic attributes that we see are part of this genre.

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Catacombs



- 'Beneath the city streets that travellers walk on each day, [dark labyrinths of underground catacombs](#) are passageways to the past, to a time when the ghostly tunnels served as burial grounds for millions of people.'

- Source: <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20121025-exploring-the-history-of-catacombs>
- Image source: Crypt of the Sepulchral Lamp in the Catacombs of Paris. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catacombs_of_Paris



So, what is a catacomb, it was referred to in the previous slide. Catacombs referred to these underground passageways and these are tunnels and also served as burial grounds for millions of people in the ancient time. So, that is what catacombs mean, underground passages which could be used as burial grounds. And there is an example of a catacomb, the image on the slide is a reference to that.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:40)

Gothic Genre and its Elements



- * shadows, a beam of moonlight in the blackness, a flickering candle, or the only source of light failing (a candle blown out or an electric failure)

Source: <https://academic.oup.com/erl/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/erl/erl001>
Image Source: Illustration from The Mysteries of Udolpho (1800 edition) <https://www.regencyhistory.net/2013/12/regency-historys-guide-to-mysteries-of-hm/>



Further elements of the Gothic include shadows, the shadows which can creep out the person who is witnessing them, a beam of moonlight in the darkness can also be a scare, can also cause a lot of Gothic scare to the person viewing it, a flickering candle which can be the only source of light and it could just flicker and blackout leaving the person in utter darkness and therefore spooking the person out. So, all these elements which terrify the character as well as the reader are some of the attributes of the genre.

An electric failure could also be an element of the Gothic character because we should remember at this point that not only the past, not only the underground passages, not only the catacombs or winding staircases or flickering candles are part of the Gothic paraphernalia, we should also remember that the Gothic also accommodates new inventions and discoveries which makes it an interesting genre because we have both the cutting edge modern technology which are kind of used by the author to kind of propel the Gothic plot.

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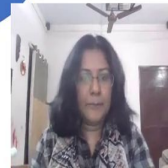
The Gothic: Definition



- First, Gothic is concerned with "the Goths or their language", thus referencing the myth of the Goths as the northern destroyers of Rome's classical architecture,
- " much of which is frequently used with reprobation to signify "the dark ages"

Source: (Reeve, 2012, p.233)

Goth, member of a Germanic people whose two branches, the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths, for centuries harassed the Roman Empire.
Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Goth>



Now, let us talk about the definition of the term Gothic. What is the Gothic and let us go back to the Oxford English Dictionary to kind of map out the various meanings of the word Gothic. Gothic is a baggy concept, so first of all it is concerned, the work Gothic is concerned with the Goths or their language, so it refers to the language and the attributes of this particular ethnic group, the Goths and these Goths are supposed to have destroyed Rome's classical architecture and culture.

Therefore, Gothic has come to signify anything that is dark, barbaric, and cruel. So, it is also a term of reprobation, it is a negative term used to critique, criticize in a negative way, the person to whom this term is applied. And if you look at that small note there, the Goth refers to Germanic people and the goths, there are two branches, the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths and as I pointed out, they have been supposed to have harassed the Roman Empire in the 5th century. So this barbaric element is associated with the Gothic and we need to understand that this is a derogatory term as well, in contemporary understanding.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:53)

The Gothic Definition



- 'Most useful in the context of art and architecture, the Gothic is an allusion to or characteristic of the Middle Ages,

- or, more obliquely, the "mediaeval" or "romantic," both of which are positioned as opposites to the classical.'

- Source: (Reeve, 2012, p.233)

- Image source: Chartres Cathedral [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_architecture#/media/File:](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_architecture#/media/File:Chartres_cath%C3%A9drale_facade.jpg)

Chartres_cath%C3%A9drale_facade.jpg



Further meanings of the Gothic. The word Gothic has also been used in the context of art and architecture and the Gothic is an illusion as well to the middle ages, and the middle ages also would imply the medieval character, the Gothic would come to signify anything that is not modern, but medieval belonging to the 11th, 10th, 12th centuries, those medieval centuries and it also has another slightly pleasing connotation of the romantic.

So, medieval, romantic but not practical or modern, so those are some of those contradictory ideas that immediately come to mind, so if it is medieval, it is not modern, if it is pleasing to the imagination, it is perhaps not very practical to the rational side of our brains. So, again we are told that it is positioned as oppositional to the classical, the sophisticated cultures of classical learning.

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The Gothic: Definition



- 'Finally, Gothic signifies "[a] term for the style of architecture prevalent in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch'

• Source: (Reeve, 2012, p.233)



Okay, further understanding of this term, let us come to another definition. So, the Gothic signifies a term for the style of architecture, prevalent in Western Europe from the 12th until the 16th century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch. So again, this definition pertains to the architectural aspect of the Gothic and the pointed arch is its very, very iconic characteristics.

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The Term 'Gothic'



- 'Historically a derogatory synonym for barbarism and vulgarity, the term was appropriated in the mid-18th century—in part due to its association with a spectacular but by then archaic tradition in northern European architecture—as a suitable generic descriptor for an innovative form of literature: the Gothic novel.'

• Hughes, William. Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature, Scarecrow Press, 2012



Okay now, let us come to a kind of a further understanding of this term Gothic. So, it is historically a term that connotes barbarism and vulgarity because of its association with the Goths who had destroyed the Roman Empire and its civilisational values, but this term was very interestingly appropriated in the middle of the 18th century and used and given to, and very new form of literature which is called the Gothic novel.

So, it is an interesting transfer that has happened in terms of this Gothic. A term which was historical as well as architectural was taken and given to this new literary mode and there are elements in this Gothic narrative which makes it ideal for it to have this particular name.

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A Modern Construct



- 'in the words of Madeline Caviness, "Gothic is quintessentially [a]... modern construct":
- it is a label imposed on the Middle Ages from the Renaissance to the present, originally as a pejorative.'

• Source: (Reeve, 2012, p.233)



And again the ideas that we have been discussing, the fact that this is a new idea, it is a new idea, Madeline Caviness calls it a “modern construct.” It is an essentially new mode of feeling that is kind of evoked in this particular narrative and again we got remember that it has a pejorative connotation, a derogatory sub-text and it is a label, it is a term that we have borrowed from the middle ages, and given to the present.

And we got remembered that the Gothic is a particular mode, a literary mode as well as a stylistic attribute which means a particular set of ideals, ideals of all fear, terror, ideals of incarceration, uncertainty, so all these are not very comfortable feeling, so there is a kind of a set

of negative emotions which are associated with this label and it is not a kind of a cultural notion which is associated with being positive, comfort or security.

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The Castle of Otranto



- 'A very important role in the so called Gothic Revival belongs to Horace Walpole whose interest in the Gothic resulted in building a "Gothic" castle in miniature at Strawberry Hill'

• (Raskauskiene, 2009, p.11-12)



Now, I want to bring this idea of the castle to the forefront in terms of the Gothic narrative. So, the castle is key to the Gothic narrative, the building, the key building, the domestic building becomes complicated in Gothic text and in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, we have a medieval castle at the heart of it. And let us kind of talk more about the context in which this novel was constructed in the next few minutes.

So, a very important role in the so called Gothic Revival belongs to Horace Walpole whose interest in the Gothic resulted in a building, in building a Gothic castle in miniature at Strawberry Hill. So, what Horace Walpole does is, in fact, he builds a medieval castle and that is remarkable, because he kind of constructs in a medieval manner, I will show you images of it in a minute.

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Strawberry Hill



'Strawberry Hill had – and now has again after years of careful restoration – roof, battlement and mantelpieces bristling with spires and gargoyles, stairs and bookcases copied from the tombs of medieval kings'.



"Walpole said his dream was of a mailed hand on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase," Michael Snodin says, "and this is undoubtedly the scene of his dream. Walpole created this house, and this house created that book."

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/feb/25/strawberry-hill-horace-walpole-gothic-castle-ottranto-open-again>



So, Strawberry Hill, this is Strawberry Hill, Walpole's invention, he constructs this building in that mode with all those battlements and spires and this has been restored and the public are allowed to visit it, I think since 2015. So, Strawberry Hill had, and now has again after years of careful restoration, roof, battlement, mantelpieces bristling with spires and gargoyles, the scary structures, those creatures, the statues of creatures that kind of scares, stairs and bookcases copied from the tombs of medieval kings.

So, he was trying to kind of revive the medieval in his mansion, in his residence and he uses this to kind of prompt the writing of The Castle of Otranto, so that is the most radical part. So he constructs the house and he kind of invests the origin of The Castle of Otranto within the space of Strawberry Hill, so this is what apparently Walpole is considered to have said.

"Walpole said his dream was of a mailed hand on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase." Mailed hand that is wearing all those protective equipment, a mailed hand and it was visible above the uppermost bannister of that huge staircase, and this is undoubtedly the scene of this dream, the dream which kind of prompted him to write The Castle of Otranto.

So, Walpole creates this house and this house created that novel, so it is extraordinary, it is extraordinary because there is this connection between the house and literary, novel, that Gothic

novel, the architecture seems to kind of prompt the novelist to write that scary novel. So, we can see that relationship between the house and the text, the Gothic text made very, very manifest in Walpole's case.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:35)

Origins of *The Castle of Otranto*



- The text came to him in a dream (Gothic writers will often claim that their stories came to them in dreams), and was written nearly subconsciously.
 - 'Shall I confess to you, what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning, in the beginning of last June, from a dream, of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head like mine filled with Gothic story), and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down, and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands [...] In short I was so engrossed with my Tale, which I completed in less than two months
- Source: (Raikauskienė, 2009, p.13)



Now, let us talk about the Origins of The Castle of Otranto a bit more because I want to talk more about the idea of the dream, so the dream is key, the dream or the nightmare is key to writing of Gothic fiction, Gothic text and the text apparently came to Horace Walpole in a dream and Gothic writers will often claim that they were prompted, prodded to write such works because of their nightmare and even Frankenstein's origin is connected to the nightmares or the dream like fantasy of Mary Shelly.

So, there is a relationship to the subconscious of the author in such Gothic text. The next quote is by Walpole, as Walpole, he supposed to have said. He says, "Shall I confess to you, what was the origin of this romance?" He calls it romance, an adventure story and he says, "I waked one morning in the beginning of last June, from a dream, of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour.

In the evening I sat down, and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands; in short I was so engrossed with my Tale, which I completed in less than two months.” So, this is a work which has been inspired from the subconscious of Walpole and that prop; that mailed hand, a gigantic hand in armor, is the starting point of this extraordinary supernatural tale.

And further interesting elements in this idea of Walpole is that he says that he did not know what he was going to say or write in this novel. Everything is inspired from the psyche, from the subconscious, so he is just the medium, as if somebody has kind of haunted his mind and asking him to kind of write down these extraordinary events set around The Castle of Otranto. So, you can also realize at this point that the writer is disassociating his rational side from the subconscious.

It is not the rational being which writes, it is the subconscious being. So, the split between the civilized and the medieval, the uncivilized, the baser instincts, that distinction comes to the fore here, and the Gothic seems to belong to the other side, the dark side.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:33)

The Castle of Otranto (1764): 'Revolt against rules'



'I have not written the book for the present age, which will endure nothing but cold common sense [...] this is the only one of my books with which I am myself pleased; I have given reins to my imagination till I became on fire with those visions and feelings which it excited. I have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers.'

- Source: (Raiikaukiene, 2009, p.12)
- Image Source: Horace Walpole https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Walpole



Walpole's comment on The Castle of Otranto is also useful for us to contextualise the position of the Gothic in terms of the rest of the text, the mode of the ideas that are to be found and the rest

of the kind of literary movements from that period, the 18th century and he says that he has to be revolting against the rules, in terms of *The Castle of Otranto*.

Walpole says, "I have not written the book for the present age which will endure nothing but cold common sense. This is the only one of my books with which I am myself pleased; I have given reins to my imagination till I became on fire with those visions and feelings which it excited. I have composed it in defiance of rules, of critics, and of philosophers."

So this is a talk of rebellion, it is a radical talk within the literary domain. So, what he is saying is that this is a new kind of text, my contemporaries will not endure it, because nothing pleases them but cold common sense. What kind of, is attractive to them, is a practical knowledge and not this work of imagination or radical imagination, but it pleases me, I am writing this to please myself.

And he says that I have let my imagination loose, I became on fire, I was inspired to write this, I was spirited to write these visions and feelings, so all these comes to his mind, all these visions about the characters of Manfred and all those figures that we can see in *The Castle of Otranto* have come to him as if they have come to him in a vision. And he says, "I have composed it in defiance of rules," all kinds of rules have been broken; I have disregarded the critics and the philosophers in order to construct this text.

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Sublime



- The 18th-century philosopher and politician Edmund Burke in his 1757 A *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*
- made a vital distinction between the *beautiful* and the *sublime* which has shaped much modern thinking about art.

Source: John Bowen <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gothic-motifs>
Image Source: <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2015/03/02/edmund-burke-and-the-sublime/>



Now, let us talk about this important idea of this sublime, the Gothic sublime. So, what is the sublime? The sublime is a concept that is introduced to us primarily and most effectively through the work of Edmund Burke, the 18th century philosopher and politician. He wrote a very famous work called *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, and in this work he makes a distinction between the beautiful and the sublime which have been very, very important in shaping our modern ideas about these two concepts of the beautiful and the sublime.

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Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*



- a strong influence on the Romantic and Gothic movements. In the work, he discusses the attraction of the grotesque, the terrible and the uncontrollable, a stark contrast to the prevailing 18th-century preferences for the controlled and balanced.
- Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/burkes-a-philosophical-enquiry-into-the-origin-of-our-ideas-of-the-sublime-and-beautiful>



And Burke's ideas have been highly influential on the romantic and the Gothic movements and he kind of discusses the human imagination's attraction towards the grotesque, the terrible and the uncontrollable. And so, he also talks about the 18th century preferences and the differences between the balanced and controlled appearance and it is contrary.

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What is sublime?

- 'Burke proposes that beauty stimulates love, but that the sublime excites horror.

While beauty relaxes, the sublime brings tension.

The feeling that something is sublime is triggered by extremes – vastness, extreme height, difficulty, darkness or excessive light'.



Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/burke-a-philosophical-enquiry-into-the-origin-of-our-ideas-of-the-sublime-and-beautiful>

Image Source: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1817, Kunsthalle Hamburg. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caspar_David_Friedrich



So, what exactly is sublime? Burke proposes that beauty stimulates love, but the sublime excited horror. Anything that is very pleasing, makes us love it because of its attractiveness, but the sublime kind of induces ideas of terror and horror in the mind of the viewer, so while beauty relaxes the sublime kind of brings tension on the mind of the onlooker and sublime is triggered, is created by extremes, vastness, extreme height, difficulty, extreme weather, and excessive light, darkness or excessive light.

So, all these elements if you think about it a bit more you will be reminded of the previous lecture that I gave in which we talked about extreme weather and nature being one of the key elements of Gothic narrative and we are immediately reminded of the vast, landscapes, the frozen deserts that we find, the frozen Arctic landscapes that we find, say for example in Frankenstein, so all these scenes of natural beauty which creates awe in the mind of the reader are sublime.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:35)

Burke: The Sublime



- "The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature . . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other."

• Source: Burke, On the Sublime, ed. J. T. Bolton. 58. <http://www.victorianweb.org/philosophy/sublime/burke.html>



More on Burkes – The sublime, he says, “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature is astonishment,” so when we look at something that is massive, that is big, a massive cataract, waterfalls or huge chasm, we are astonished and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended.

And we are horrified, so some degree of horror is kind of spontaneously created in us, we are astonished by those grandeur in nature. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any others, so the only passion, the only emotion that such grandeur can evoke in the mind of the reader is an element of horror and fear and awe.

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The Castle as the Object of the Sublime



- 'The labyrinthine and claustrophobic space associated with Gothic architecture has been the defining convention of Gothic fiction since Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This space is usually represented by a castle, a monastery, a convent, or a prison (often in ruins). This architectural space is integral to the psychological machinations of Gothic fiction, and is used to invoke feelings of fear, awe, entrapment and helplessness in characters and readers alike.'

• (Raskauskienė, 2009, p.50)



Now, how do we apply the ideas of this sublime to, say for example, a castle that we can see work such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. So critics suggest that the labyrinthine and claustrophobic space associated with the Gothic architecture has been the defining convention of Gothic fiction since Walpole's work. While great mountains, while the frigid Arctic wastes, have caused sublime feelings on the mind of the onlooker.

Critics also argued that the dark passage ways, the convoluted passage ways, the confusing maze like passageways and the claustrophobia of castles, incarcerating castles also create sublime feelings on the mind of the reader. So, this space is usually represented by a castle, represented within the castle, a monastery, a convent or a prison which is in ruins and this kind of architectural space, the key architectural space that we find in the Gothic, the one that kind of harasses its occupants or its victims is integral.

It is very, very intertwined to the psychological imagination of Gothic fiction and the castle is used to evoke the same feelings of sublimity, such as feelings of fear or entrapment and helplessness, there is vulnerability on the person, on the part of the person who is within such a castle and who is looking at a great big mountain scene, so the vulnerability which is there, in the character within the novel can also be transferred to the reader who is reading it, who is outside of the novel as well.

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