

**The Popular Gothic Novel**  
**Lecture 59**  
**Week 12 B: Lecture Overview**

Hello all. Welcome to the NPTEL course, The Popular Gothic Novel. In today's session, I will be summarising some of the texts that we have discussed in the previous weeks. I will be focusing on week 1, week 4, and week 7.

Let us begin the session, by looking at the genre of Gothic literature itself. Gothic literature came into being in the middle of the 18th century as a result of social, historical factors. The term Goth was used to refer to the Germanic people initially, and it was used in relation to Medieval Art and Architecture. It was not until the eighteenth century, during the Romantic period, the term Gothic was applied to literature. The term often has a negative connotation, and it initially signified anything dark, barbaric, medieval and not modern.

The term Gothic, first appeared in literature, in the work of Horace Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto*. This work has a very important role in the development of the Gothic genre. It was not only the first of its kind, but it also set a vogue for Gothic fiction. One of the key Gothic trope, employed by writers in their Gothic fiction, is the idea of uncertainty, and it was achieved right from the title page, by not giving away the name of the writers.

If you could remember the works, such as; *Frankenstein*, *Vathek*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Castle of Otranto*, and *The Vampire*. You could see that; the name of the author is missing on the title page, and this was deliberately done by the writers to create a mixture of doubt and uncertainty and estrangement in the mind of the readers. John Polidori's *Vampire* is considered to be the first vampire story. And Mary Shelley, through the creation of a monster in her work, *Frankenstein*, not only took the Gothic genre to next level; but it also, what she was also able to place a word of caution of scientific inventions and discoveries to her tale.

The setting of the novels in Gothic literature is very important and the main Gothic elements include extreme weather and landscape, rugged mountains, thick forests, omens and ancestral curses, magic, and supernatural manifestations, a wilful villain, horrifying and terrifying events, or a threat of such things happening in the future.

Architecture plays of vital role in Gothic literature. Most of the Gothic novels are set in big castles and the place of the dwelling can be haunted, or not. Usually, the castles will have an evil master. One of the important functions of the Gothic is to arouse a pleasing melancholy

in the mind of the readers, and about the castles of exactly that purpose. Dungeons, underground passages, crypts, catacombs, hidden spaces, spooky basements, attics, labyrinthine, mazes, winding staircases and dark corridors; are other Gothic elements, that one can find in the novels.

Darkness is always associated with evil and eerie atmosphere. And the Gothic writers do not fail to incorporate such elements in the Gothic novels. Hence, shadows flickering or not candles, a beam of moonlight in the blackness and electric failure often feature in Gothic novels.

We have also discussed in the first week; the idea of the Gothic sublime, which was a term introduced by Edmund Burke, in his work, 'Philosophical Inquiry, into the origin of ideas of the sublime and beautiful'. In this work, he distinguishes between beauty and sublime. He proposes that beauty simulates love, but sublime excites horror. Terror and horror are important facets of Gothic literature.

Although we use these two terms interchangeably, it must be understood that there is a key distinction between the 2. According to Ann Radcliffe Gothic terror is beneficial to the soul; whereas, gothic horror is detrimental to the well-being of the human soul; as horror confines, freezes and destroys the human soul. If Gothic horror is definite and can be achieved through graphic descriptions; Gothic terror is achieved through uncertainty, obscurity, indeterminacy. It is important to understand that Gothic terror leads to Gothic sublime. Gothic horror involves a monster blood or corpse in novels; while terror goes down into an individual's unclear psyche, and entails multiple conflicting emotions stirring at once.

So, what is the ultimate aim of a Gothic novel? It aims to evoke a particularised response from the readers, which is fear. Gothic genre appeals to the primitive instincts of the human beings and it also highlights the ultimate evil, that human beings are capable of. Gothic fiction is also characterised by a sense of foreboding; even if, there is no potential threat. The characters are disturbed by premonitions and dreams, and they always have this feeling, that something bad is going to happen.

It is interesting to note, how Gothic fiction is used in the perpetration of the imperial rhetoric, and also, the image of the British country as the ideal, which is in constant conflict with the continental other. The foreign is portrayed as something, that poses a threat to

British identity. We must also understand that Gothic literature is not something, which is limited to Britain.

We can see Gothic literature across the globe. When it comes to India, we have works like *The Hungry Stones* and *The Lost Jewels* by Rabindranath Tagore, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's *The Blue Light*, and *A Face in the Dark* by Ruskin Bond are finest examples of Indian Gothic literature. Edgar Allan Poe's *Raven*, and Coleridge's *Christabel*, and *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* are best examples of Gothic poetry.

Now, let us look at the novel *Northanger Abbey*. *Northanger Abbey* is a more Gothic novel written by Jane Austen. The novel opens with the Catherine Morland, receiving the invitation from the Allen's to go to bath with them. Catherine is exposed to the fashionable society of London for the first time there, and she befriends Isabella Thorpe. Catherine Morland is an avid reader of Gothic fiction and Isabella Thorpe pretends to have read a lot as it is trendy to read Gothic novels.

In Bath, Catherine is also introduced to Henry Tilney and she becomes infatuated with him. Catherine and Isabella already joined by the brothers, James and John Thorpe. James and Isabella have an affair and John Thorpe also tries to have a relationship with Catherine. But Catherine must have fallen in love with Henry Tilney already and she does not, she is not very appreciative of John Thorpe's advances. Catherine Morland is later introduced to Henry Tilney sister Eleanor Tilney. Their father General Tilney states Catherine to be a rich person and he opens, and he extends an invitation for Catherine to come along with them to *Northanger Abbey*.

When Catherine reaches *Northanger Abbey*, she lets her imagination to go wild, her indemnity to distinguish between reality and fiction, make her believe that the *Northanger Abbey* is just like any other castles that she has read about in the novels and she also thinks that the house is haunted and suspects General Tilney of the murder of his wife. When Henry Tilney understands what is going inside Catherine's head, he confronts her and becomes upset when she tells him about her doubts.

After this, Catherine understands her mistakes and ask pardon for her behaviour. Meanwhile, General Tilney, hears from John Thorpe that Catherine's family is poor. He immediately asked Catherine to leave *Northanger Abbey*. But, in the end, everything works in favour of Catherine and she marries Henry Tilney. Catherine learns a lesson, and she also understands

the manipulative nature of Isabella Thorpe, who leaves James Morland for Frederick Tilney but ends up marrying none.

When you look at this novel, we understand the ease with which Jane Austen parodies Gothic fiction, and just by looking at the ease, we understand that she has a very good knowledge of the genre, and its convention, and she must have also enjoyed reading Gothic literature.

When we read *Northanger Abbey* closely, we understand that the novel is at once a critique, as well as a defence of other Gothic novels. Jane Austen mostly deals with the issue of marriage and domesticity in her novels. But in this novel, she takes a turn from her typical style, and this novel should not be read only as a parody, but also as a complex novel, as it highlights the societal horrors that people have to face on a daily basis, and Gothic becomes a tool that Austen employs to expose it.

Gothic literature often features a curious heroine and Catherine Morland is the finest example of it. She is not only curious but also innocent, honest and naive, who is not exposed to the hypocritical ways of the society until she comes to Bath. Her inexperience makes her fall short of judgement and becomes blind to the manipulative and scheming nature of Isabella Thorpe.

It is Henry Tilney who points out the shortcoming of Catherine to her. He is an ideal reader who rightly understands the difference between reality and fiction. He is also a good storyteller. He is able to foresee what Catherine is going to encounter in the castle, in the abbey, and he becomes more of a prophet in the story.

Henry Tilney is also the embodiment of the ideal English identity. He takes upon himself to re-educate Catherine Morland, and he wanted Catherine to believe that these nightmarish happenings, that she reads so much about in the Gothic fiction do not really happen in the domesticity. It does not really happen in the domesticity of English houses.

This idea can be related to what we have discussed earlier about how England is projected as a safe haven against the demonic other, where all the terrible things happen. Henry Tilney and Eleanor Tilney emerges the mental figures of Catherine in the novel. But it is safe to say that they are not adequate mentors as it is Catherine herself, who emerges as her own mentor. Catherine makes a lot of mistakes throughout the novel but she does not fail to understand and rectify it.

As a result, she emerges as a mature figure through, towards the end of the novel, and Gothic becomes the tool for Catherine to manoeuvre her ways into the world and identify true friendship and loyalty. In this novel, we do not have a traditional Gothic woman, who tortures people and keeps them as prisoners in the castle. But Catherine Morland finds a lot of similarity between General Tilney and Count Montoni and she even misjudges General Tilney and comes to false conclusions.

General Tilney is a patriarch of the house and he acts like a despot. His children do not defy his words and obey him unconditionally. He becomes irritated very easily and makes sure that everybody lives according to the rules that he had laid. Just like Count Montoni, General Tilney is obsessed with money. Although he has not committed a murder, there is a symbolic death in the story.

It is right on the part of the readers to assume that Mrs Tilney must have been heavily unhappy in the world that General Tilney had created for himself and for others. John Thorpe is also in a sense a Gothic villain. He is deeply egocentric, conceited, and arrogant and ill-mannered, and he had come in the way of happiness of Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney.

The character of Isabella Thorpe is very interesting. She can be seen as the anti-heroine. Unlike the heroine, Catherine Morland, she understands the ways of the world and thinks that money is the most important thing in the world than anything. She carefully plans her life and builds her relationships. Accordingly, to climb up the social ladder, to lead a comfortable life. She does not mind being dishonest and manipulative to achieve her goals.

When she learns that James Morland only has a modest income, she switches her affection from James Morland to Frederick Tilney. But in the end, she had to pay a price for her avarice and does not marry either of them. The growth of Catherine's character can also be seen when she finally sees the deceit behind the past phase of Isabella Thorpe, and she is able to reject her.

Northanger Abbey can also be seen as a female Gothic, and the biggest issue, which the novel raises, is societal gender inequalities. I think this reading of the novel shows a power imbalance prevalent in the society at that time, and women becoming victims of the societal double standards.

In most of Jane Austen's novels, we can see that she talks about marriage and how important it is for women to marry well to have a safe future. Women depend on men for money, and their sole occupation in life is to find a good suitor. In our *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, she talks extensively about this. Women are driven to extreme ends to get married, so that solely because they have very limited options to sustain themselves.

In this novel, we can see how Catherine and Isabella are the victims of society. In one sense, we can argue that Isabella's nature as a conniving woman, is because of her understanding of the stature of her family in the society, and she takes it upon herself to improve the standards of her family as well as herself. The method she adopts for this, for her betterment is evil and that must not be celebrated.

We also see the way, that a victim can also be the victimiser, Isabella is an example. Isabella takes advantage of Catherine's innocence and is not loyal to her. Initially, it was Isabella, who was a guiding force to Catherine. Eleanor Tilney is also a victim. She does not have a say in the family and lives under the shadow of the patriarch, her father. Her choice of a life partner also depends upon the likes and dislikes of her father.

The character of Henry Tilney's mother must also be looked at as a victim, as she must have had possibly endured a loveless suffocating life. Women, in general, are binded by the laws of society in men and that is very well evident in this novel. This notion becomes an important message as well, and in fact, the greater horror of Catherine is not the fictional horror that she makes up, or she thinks about extensively. But the horror that arises out of her understanding, that people marry for money and make the lives of their spouses miserable.

Now, let us shift our focus to *A Christmas Carol*. Charles Dicken's *Christmas Carol* was published in the year 1843, and It was an immediate success. It was translated into many languages and it never went out of print. Although Charles Dicken's was born in Portsmouth, he was in every sense a Londoner and his stories mostly talk about urban London life.

Charles Dicken's is essentially a social reformer and through his writing, he brought to the public notice the brutality, injustices, and immorality of the society. He was able to talk directly to the sentiments of the Victorian readers, thereby making a change possible. Charles Dicken's was prompted to write the novella *A Christmas Carol*, as he was moved by the appalling revelations made by the parliamentary report on child labour.

He wanted this issue to be taken to the public and make them understand the poor working conditions of children as well as the impediments of industrialization. His project was a success as the parliament, made significant reform in child labour within 6 months of the publication of Christmas Carol. Christmas Carol is divided into 5 staves, and the structure of the story mimics a musical composition.

We have already seen, how architecture plays an important role in a Gothic story, and unlike other novels we have seen earlier, Christmas Carol does not have a big mansion or a castle. It does not present outside the city limits, but Scrooge lives at the very heart of England, and the Gothic is embedded in the urban streets of London.

It is important for the Gothic story to maintain a haunting aura, some regression or a secret from the past and this is achieved through the house in which the story is set. The house belongs to Jacob Marley who is Scrooge's former business partner, who had been dead for 7 years and the house, as the story opens, is cold, gloomy, dark and bleak.

After reading this novella, we understand that Dicken's does not imitate the traditional Gothic tropes in the novel. But he harnesses signs and turns them into an inventive and effective way of telling a Gothic story. Christmas Carol is a Gothic story structure but a moral story in essence. It talks about the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from a miserly rich person, who fails to see the hardships of the poor into a charitable person.

As the story opens, we see a penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge who is unkind to his clerk Bob Cratchit, his nephew and to these 2 gentlemen who had come to his house to seek a donation. That very night Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Jacob Marley. He appears before Scrooge to warn him about the impending doom and ask him to mend his ways. But Scrooge does not take the apparition seriously and as promised he receives a visitation from the ghost of Christmas past, Christmas present and the Christmas yet to come.

The wishes that these 3 ghosts show Ebenezer Scrooge makes him understand that people live in abject poverty. He feels guilty for his miserliness and it results in Scrooge reduction. The trope of Gothic children is important in the narrative. Gothic children are innocent children, who are uncorrupted by the ways of the world but eventually becomes a victim of the society.

Tiny Tim, little Fan and the symbolic children want an ignorance redeems Scrooge and is brought back to life through their innocence. They do not incite horror in Scrooge, but sympathy. And as a result, Scrooge is transformed into a better person. The novel also exemplifies societal horror, the image of the dying woman sitting in the gutter and surrounded by the ghost of rich businessmen opens up a meal for discussion on the need for charity and empathy.

Ebenezer Scrooge represents the hard heartiness of the industrialists and the story foregrounds the problems in the society that arose out of the industrial revolution. The crippled Tiny Tim is the embodiment of the vivid reality of many young children during those times, who had to work long hours in factories, in an unsafe environment with dangerous machines. The grotesque comedy and macabre imagery dominated Dicken's novella, and in the story, there was a blend of horror and comedy which makes it so appealing to the creators

So, what parallels can we draw between A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens and Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen? Firstly the 2 stories exemplified the societal horrors, and it is the societal horrors which are foregrounded in the story, rather than the fictional horror. The Gothic trope is used effectively by the 2 texts in demonstrating the message of forgiveness and redemption. They are essentially moral tales and at the end, the lead characters are portrayed as changed people.

Ebenezer Scrooge is a round character, who may or may not have been a good person when he was young. But from the beginning of the tale, he is at the wrong side and is eventually redeemed. Whereas, Catherine is an innocent and naive person, who learns her lesson and corrects her mistakes at the end.

Northanger Abbey and Christmas Carol diverged from the traditional Gothic narrative, and the writer harnesses the Gothic tropes to bring out the social message, rather than faithfully paralleling it in the story. These 2 stories also talk about the victims of the society. When it comes to Northanger Abbey, Catherine, Isabella, and Eleanor can be seen as victims, and in Christmas Carol, it is the Gothic children.

The 2 stories do not display violence bloodshed or any other horrifying aspect of Gothic literature. But just through suspense, indeterminacy and obscurity, the terror is established in these Gothic stories. The character such as, Ebenezer Scrooge, General Tinley, and Isabella

Thorpe exhibits obsession for money, and it is yet another parallel that we can draw from these 2 stories. That is all for today's session. Thank you all for watching.