ABSTRACT

The present study examines the influence of Gothic tradition on the major Romantic poets – Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats.

The term “Gothic” comes from the word ‘Goths’, one of the German tribes that invaded Europe during the fifth and sixth centuries and took part in the conquering of the Roman Empire. Subsequent generations considered them to be barbaric and uncivilized, and thus during the Renaissance, critics referred to the architecture of the thirteenth century as ‘Gothic’. However, with the passage of time the term ‘Gothic’ evolves, to be used in a number of different fields: as a literary term, as a historical term, as an artistic term, as well as an architectural term.

In a literary context ‘Gothic’ is most usually applied to a group of novels written between the 1760s and the 1820s. Their authors are: Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, William Beckford, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Mary Shelley and C.R. Maturin. When thinking of the Gothic novel, a set of characteristics springs readily to mind: an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense.

In Gothic fiction the reader passes from the reasoned order of the everyday world into a dark region governed by supernatural beings, a region that inspires dread and horror, where decay abounds and death is always at hand. The plots of Gothic novels are usually set in Middle Ages, and the setting represented by ruins, haunted castles, monasteries with their dark prisons, long corridors and hidden passages to create ‘Gothic gloom’. The Gothic novelists had discovered the charm of horror and the power of the supernatural.
The main stream of Gothic fiction which issued from Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* diverged into three parallel channels: first, the Gothic – Historical type developed by Clara Reeve and Sophia Lee; secondly, the school of terror initiated by Mrs. Radcliffe and maintained by a host of imitators – perhaps the most extensive Gothic type in which superstitious dread is aroused by constant, dim suggestions of the supernatural; and lastly, the works of the school of horror, distinguished by lurid violence and crudity. Walpole adumbrated the machinery and characters of a Gothic story; Miss Reeve designed the characteristic Gothic ghost in English setting; while Mrs. Radcliffe spread all over the warm colours of her romantic imagination. Eventually, the two Gothic streams of terror and horror met in the genius of Mary Shelley and Charles Robert Maturin.

The Gothic through its fiction proved to become one of the most popular and influential literary genres, whose themes and trappings can be traced from the works of the Romantic poets to the horror movies of today. Gothic writers had a profound impact on the budding Romantic Movement from Coleridge to Keats. During the Romantic Movement around the beginning of the nineteenth century people felt an attraction for the past. This led to a revival of interest in all things Gothic and medieval. Romanticism emerged as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. The Romantics wanted to escape from the concrete historical situation. They used various ways to achieve the goal; some looked back to the medieval past, some sought it in religion or the supernatural, others tried to find it in nature. During the Romantic period Gothic became associated with the dark, the strange, and the bizarre. Many motifs and themes in Romantic art have remarkable similarities with the Gothic. The use of the sublime and the overt use of the supernatural profoundly influenced the style and material of the emerging Romantics.

The Gothic novel and Romantic poetry were in constant interaction, many writers of each (making frequent sallies) into the domain of the other. The average Gothic novelist was a poet too. While the Gothic romancers tried
their hands at fragments of Romantic poetry, the Romantic poets too experimented with the Gothic genre. The first generation of Romantic poets drew their inspiration from contemporary romance. The Gothic Movement in novel and the Romantic Movement in poetry share in common an interest in medievalism and in the supernatural. In fact, at times Gothic qualities appear to be one aspect of romanticism. Further resemblance between Gothic fiction and Romantic poetry can be evidenced in the following aspects: the philosophy of composition, the portrayal of the characters, the treatment of external nature. We notice in both the novels and the poems the same handling of grotesque and repellent themes, the same nuances of style and the use of close wrought suspense.

The Gothic villain and Romantic hero come of the same lineage. The villains Manfred, Montoni and Schedoni in the novels of Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe show us the Byronic hero. These figures move in a similar world: the panoramic landscape setting, the Gothic interiors evoking terror and fear – in fact the whole machinery of Mrs. Radcliffe and the authors of her school furnished the pattern and set the style for poets of the succeeding generation.

The thesis comprises of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction provides the historical background of the term ‘Gothic’ and its definitions in different fields – historical, artistic, architectural, and literary term. It also traces the revival of Gothic architecture, which is used as a setting for Gothic novels that provides an air of gloom and mystery. In the introduction the researcher discusses the origins of Gothic fiction – interest in heroic romances of the Middle Ages, Shakespeare, Spencer, Smollett, Graveyard poetry, and the sublime which provide an important stimulus to the imaginative aspirations of Gothic fiction.

Chapter I studies in great detail the major Gothic novels in order to explore the main characteristics and Gothic elements in them. It begins with the first Gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto (1764) by Horace Walpole, who is regarded as the chief initiator of the genre. Then follows the analysis of other

Walpole’s *Otranto* sets out the features and themes for use in all later Gothic texts. It contained a crude accumulation of terror, striking incidents. The Gothic novel, in his hands was remarkable only for its ‘Gothic’ and ‘mysterious’ character. For Walpole had sought in the Middle Ages what was most frightening and most savage. Clara Reeve attempted to moderate the extravagances of her predecessors, while in the hands of Mrs. Radcliffe the Gothic novel gave genteel shivers and suggested the uncanny. But with one blow Lewis swept away all the previous effusions of the Gothic school. In his novel *The Monk* each horror became more ghastly than the one which preceded it. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a novel, which combines Miltonic language and sublime imagery with description of violence, horror, and decay. She like Byron increasingly found in the Gothic, a language for philosophical and psychological inquiry. Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* shows an atmosphere of foreboding, claustrophobia, torture, alienation and paranoia. As an Irish Protestant, Maturin was keen to attack the tyranny of Catholicism and expose the methods of the Spanish Inquisition. He uses all the Gothic conventions in a rich multitude of settings, times and guises.

Chapter II examines Coleridge’s works in order to find out the Gothic elements in them. The analysis covers the major poems of S.T. Coleridge – *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, Kubla Khan, The Nightingale, Dejection: An Ode, The Three Graves, Osorio, Remorse, The Pain of Sleep, and The Wanderings of Cain*. In addition, Coleridge’s reviews of the Gothic novels by Mrs. Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin are also taken into consideration.

Coleridge’s fascination for the Gothic can be well traced to his early years. The presence of supernaturalism, elements of mystery, suspense, dream
representation, medievalism in his poetry, unitedly proclaims his use of the Gothic conventions. Unlike the writers of the Gothic school (Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis) his use of the Gothic elements is subtle. Though he employs the familiar precedents of the Gothic to invoke a kind of horrified fear of the strange and the uncanny, yet they in his hands acquire a new scope and character. Instead of confining himself to an outworn dread of the uncanny aspects (spectres and phantoms), he moves over a wide range of emotions to touch equally on feelings of guilt-remorse, suffering-relief, grief-joy, hate-forgiveness. Through the Gothic he explores the human psyche and brings out the psychological responses of the human character as a comment on the effect of evil, of curses, of pain, of anguish, of remorse.

Chapter III studies Shelley's works for exploring the influence of the Gothic writers on his works - the two Gothic romances, Zastrozzi and St. Irvyne, The Revolt of Islam, The Cenci, Prometheus Unbound, The Wandering Jew, Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Queen Mab and other poems. Shelley’s taste for the grotesque and fantastic remained throughout his life, a distinguishing characteristic. The supernatural had ever for him an unusual fascination and it colours his poetry and philosophy. Infact Shelley’s political interests found in the Gothic apparatus a most powerful means of expression for his abhorrence of the evils of tyranny - monarchy, aristocracy and religion.

Chapter IV focuses on the influence of the Gothic on Byron through his portrayal of the Byronic Hero. That Byron modelled his hero on the Gothic villain goes without askance - the same world - weariness pervades them; with gleaming eyes and passion wrought faces, they resemble Walpole’s Manfred and Mrs. Radcliffe’s villain heroes. Cast in the true Gothic mould and verging on the metaphysical superman - they are selfish and unscrupulous, brave and rash; their sinister personality and fierce manner striking dread all around, while a veil of dark mystery hangs over their early life.

Byron’s oriental tales owed much of their popularity to the public interest in the oriental romances during the late eighteenth and nineteenth
century. In his oriental poems, Byron exploited these romances in different ways – borrowing incidents, imagery and themes. These poems represent a world of – adventures in love, lust and incest, the role and position of women and the description of the Byronic hero in juxtaposition with certain social, religious and political evils of the society dominated by the Pashas and Emirs. Furthermore, these oriental romances provided even the nomenclatures for most of the leading heroes and heroines of his poems such as, Hassan, Selim, Zuleika, Leila and Gulnare.

Chapter V studies Keats's interest in Gothic by analyzing them and pointing out the similarities between his poems and the Gothic novels – particularly Beckford's *Vathek* and Radcliffe’s novels. This chapter highlights Keats’ use of the medieval model associated with the Gothic in his poetry. In the longer pieces of narrative phantasy (which form the larger portion of his writings) he selects for example in *Endymion* – a legend of the sensuous Grecian mythology, or as in *Isabella or the Pot of Basil* – a story from Boccaccio, or as in *The Eve of St. Agnes* – the hint of a middle-age superstition or as in *Lamia* – a story of Greek witchcraft. Keats gets himself to weave out the little text of substance into a linked succession of imaginary movements and incidents taking place in the dim depths of forest, grotto, seashore, the interior of Gothic castle, or the marble vestibule of a Corinthian palace. This in effect aids and adds to the Gothic dimension that one discovers in reading the poems of Keats.

This is followed by a Conclusion, which offers a brief outline of the findings of this study. It also sums up the implications of the present study related to the influence of Gothic tradition on the major Romantic poets.