INTRODUCTION

Definitions and historical background

In a thesis on *The Influence of Gothic Tradition on the Major Romantic Poets*, it seems reasonable to begin with a brief examination of the word 'Gothic' itself. It is a word, which has a wide variety of meanings. It is used in a number of different fields: as a literary term, as a historical term, as an artistic term and as an architectural term.

According to The Chambers 21st century Dictionary, Gothic as a historical term is "belonging or relating to the Goths or their language". As an architectural term it is "belonging or relating to a style of architecture featuring high pointed arches, popular in Europe between twelfth century and sixteenth century". And as a literary term it is "belonging or relating to a type of literature dealing with mysterious or supernatural events in an eerie setting, popular in eighteenth century".

The word Gothic derives from the word 'Goth.' The Chambers 21st century Dictionary defines the word Goth as "a member of an East Germanic people who, invaded various parts of the Roman Empire between the third and fifth centuries". The Goths were considered to be barbarians who had greatly weakened the Roman Empire. They are believed to have behaved in a bloodthirsty and cruel manner and by trying to defeat the Romans were thought to be a threat to civilization itself and the ordered society of the day.

The combination of Gothic Romance represents a union of two of the major influences in the development of European culture (the Roman Empire and the Germanic tribes that invaded it). The word 'Gothic' was first recorded in 1611 in reference to the language of the Goths. Since then the word has been used in an extended manner so as to be inclusive of several meanings: "Germanic", "medieval, not classical", "barbarous", and also covers an architectural style that was not Greek or Roman. Horace Walpole applied the
word ‘Gothic’ to his novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in the sense of ‘medieval, not classical’ and filled it with scenes of terror and gloom in a medieval setting.

Nicholas Bacon wrote in 1648 that English laws are largely Gothic in origin: “Nor can any nation upon earth shew so much of the ancient Gothique law as this Island hath”5. In 1672, Sir William Temple called the English a Gothic people: “The Saxons were one branch of those Gothic Nations, which, swarming from the Northern Hive, had, under the conduct of Odin, possessed themselves ancietly of all those mighty tracts of Land that surround the Baltick Sea”6. In the essay ‘Of Poetry,’ Temple refers a second time to “the ancient Western Goths, our Ancestors”7. In 1694, Robert Molesworth [writing on Denmark] argues that England’s government in its origins was Gothic and Vandalic: “The Ancient form of Government here was the same which the Goths and Vandals established in most if not all Parts of Europe whither they carried their conquests, and which in England is retained to this day for the most part”8. According to Swift, writing in 1719, “parliaments were a peculiarly Gothic institution, implanted in England by the Saxon princes who first introduced them into this Island from the same original with the other Gothic forms of government in most parts of Europe”9. John Oldmixon, writing in 1724, also assimilates Gothic to English history: “No nation has preserved their Gothic constitution better than the English”10. Bolingbroke similarly saw Goths on the horizon of England’s foundation: “Tho the Saxons submitted to the Yoke of Rome, in matters of Religion, they were far from giving up the freedom of their Gothic institutions of government”11. Perhaps the most striking of all is Harrington’s comment in 1656 to those “inundations of Huns, Goths, Vandals, Lombards, Saxons, which breaking the Roman Empire, deformed the whole world”12.

In view of this varied usage of the term ‘Gothic’, the primary problem in the investigation of the origins of the Gothic vogue in England is semantic.
Historically, the word ‘Gothic’ describes only a single Germanic tribe out of many which crossed the Danube in AD 376. However, it is by no means so clear as the writers quoted above, would have their readers believe that the English are a Gothic folk and that ‘Gothic’ as a name is applicable universally to all the Germanic tribes.

The speculative geographers were interested in tracing the origins of the people of the world to an ultimate beginning. The Bible, in part, supplied answers to their inquiries; either the Deluge and the subsequent spread of Noah’s progeny over the earth or the Babel episode offered a starting point. Trojan history and the flight of the descendants of Aeneas subsequent to Troy’s fall appealed to other writers. In the 16th century, an important group of geographers in the Scandinavian countries, particularly a circle of scholars centred at Upsala University, led by a nationalistic interest in the origins of their countries evolved a theory of a vagina gentium, a ‘womb of nations’. which (on the authority of Jordanes, sixth-century historian of the Goths) they placed in Scandinavia, or Scandza (as Jordanes called it).

The primary importance of Jordanes and the modern revival of interest in Gothic antiquity, rests on the credence he gave to the theory that all the German tribesmen were generally ‘Goths’, all stemming from the group which migrating from Scandza in the north, peopled Europe. In Jordane’s words:

The same mighty sea has also in its arctic region, that is, in the north, a great island named Scandza from which my tale (by God’s grace) shall take its beginnings for the race whose origin you ask to know burst forth like a swarm of bees from the midst of this Island into the land of Europe. But how or in what wise we shall explain hereafter, if it be the Lord’s will.13

Gothic Architecture

The term ‘Gothic’ was, and still is used in the field of architecture to refer to medieval architecture, principally ecclesiastical, dating from about the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. During the Renaissance, critics referred to the
architecture of the thirteenth century as "Gothic". The term evolved to refer to medieval creations in architecture and writing, and especially those creations, which were considered mysterious and reminiscent of superstitious nature.

Upon entering a Gothic structure one is often overwhelmed by the spiritual effect of the height and symbolic detail, both of which draw the visitor's gaze towards the spiritual realm. The size of the interior of the Gothic buildings was so much greater than the average construction that it challenged the perspective of the visitor. The experience of vastness has often been referred to as a religious one, since the immense size of the interior makes the visitor feel small in comparison to the building.

Between 1150 and 1400, Gothic architecture flourished, particularly in France and England. The person generally honoured as the originator of the Gothic style was Abbot Suger (1081-1151), whose Benedictine Abbey Church of St. Denis near Paris, reveals the first clear Gothic features. The Gothic style quickly spread to the Cathedral of Notre Dam de Paris, and from there to the rest of France. Close ties with the English allowed the new style to appear in Canterbury Cathedral and within a century throughout the island. During its peak in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Gothic architecture dominated church building in France, Italy, Germany, and England.

Between 1748 and 1777, Horace Walpole, son of the powerful politician Sir Robert Walpole, purchased an uninteresting box-shaped home called Strawberry Hill in Twickenhem outside London, a fashionable area well known for its neoclassical or Palladian homes. Over the next quarter century, Walpole assembled a committee of experts in Gothic architecture, who assisted him in modifying Strawberry Hill according to Gothic design motifs. Strawberry Hill eventually became the most distinctive Gothic revival structure of the eighteenth century. Between 1760 and 1850, the Gothic revival in architecture inspired by Walpole and others exerted a widespread influence in England and America. Prime examples are the Parliament Building in London, Georgia
Military College, St. Stephens Episcopal Church and First Presbyterian Church in Milledgeville.

The style of Gothic architecture is distinguished by tall pillars, high vaulted ceilings, pointed arches, evocative ruins of abbeys and castles. For D.P. Varma, "the Gothic novel is a conception as vast and complex as a Gothic Cathedral. One finds in them the same sinister overtones and the same solemn grandeur". The weird and eerie atmosphere of Gothic fiction was derived from the Gothic architecture, which evoked feelings of horror, wildness, suspense and gloom. The ingredient of fear crept in only as a by-product of the union of Gothic with gloom, making terror an attribute of Gothic architecture. Feeling of terror in its turn became the characteristic atmosphere of the Gothic architecture; castles, convents, subterranean vaults, dungeons, and ruined abbeys. Gothic architecture in the form of a half-ruined castle or abbey became a popular part of most novels' settings to create Gothic gloom and sublimity to evoke a sense of awe. A castle had fairy-tale as well as medieval associations. Such buildings displayed all the paraphernalia of fear: dark corridors, secret underground passages, huge clanging doors, and dungeons with grilled windows.

It is important to remember that 'Gothic' connoted architecture long before it connoted literature. Horace Walpole was the first to establish a link between the two, his obsession with his beloved miniature castle at Strawberry Hill was the inspiration for *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and the book's subtitle, 'A Gothic Story', marks the first time that the term was used in a literary context. As in Gothic architecture so in Gothic fiction an air of gloom and mystery prevails. The representation of the labyrinthine and claustrophobic space associated with Gothic architecture has been the defining convention of Gothic fiction. This architectural space (castle, convents, prisons etc.) is integral to the psychological machination of Gothic fiction, and is used to evoke feelings of fear, awe, entrapment and helplessness in characters and
readers alike. Furthermore, the architecture itself can be said to be psychically alive.

The following excerpt will present the relationship between the physical structure and the emotive affect within Gothic fiction, and explore how the individual or social psyche is externalized in its various architectural forms:

There, said Montoni, speaking for the first time in several hours, is Udolpho.

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark-gray stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendor. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity; and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.15

The Origins of Gothic Fiction

The Gothic novel had a good historical and psychological justification for its origin. There was nothing sudden or spontaneous about it. It was rather the outcome of an organic development with wide-spreading roots penetrating deep into the past. Romance, born out of a spark of reaction, was fanned by the interplay of forces within and without by the speculations and philosophies of Germany and France (countries to which English minds gave as much as they took) and all were enriched in the exchange. The revival of interest in heroic romances; in Shakespeare, Spenser, Smollett, Milton, and dissatisfaction with the realistic novels of the mid-eighteenth century provided the necessary impetus and desire for Gothic fiction.
The last four decades of the eighteenth century record the upsurge of a ‘Renaissance of Wonder’ that affected poetry, painting, gardening, and architecture. The Gothic novel was an early expression of that movement which carried all Europe into a century of new thoughts and new strivings.

Scratching the surface of any Gothic fiction, the debt to Shakespeare will be there. Shakespeare’s plays provide good examples of the supernatural and weird atmosphere. Key scenes of supernatural terror are plundered by Walpole and then by many other fiction writers. *Macbeth* has a variety of apparitions, a signal bell, a forest, thunder and lightning, a cavern, a castle, and a midnight murder done to the accompaniment of supernatural sounds. *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* use prophecies and supernatural portents; *King Lear* has a desolate heath and nature at her wildest in thunder, lightning, and rain; *Romeo and Juliet* has a whole gamut of horrors; tombs, vaults, sepulchers, bones, and fumes; and above all, the ghost scenes from *Hamlet*.

In Walpole’s time these episodes had already acquired autonomous fame in the theatre through the thrilling naturalism of David Garrick’s acting style, capable of persuading a skeptical audience that they too witnessed the supernatural. When Walpole in his preface to the second edition of the “inspired writings” of the past that serve as his model writes of “witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena, never lose sight of their human character”\(^{16}\), he is thinking primarily of Shakespeare’s tragedies and Garrick’s interpretations of them.

Shakespeare had a very specific value for the romance revival in Britain. Historically, he was situated on the cusp between Gothic and enlightened times. Shakespeare’s inclusion of comic scenes in the tragedies was adopted by Walpole in *Otranto* and it was to remain a feature of Gothic romance through to Ann Radcliffe, Lewis’s *The Monk* and beyond. Smollett had already anticipated the mood for Gothic romance; his novel *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) foreshadows Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and the tale of terror. The
gloomy scenes in deserted forests, and the tremors of fear to which Ferdinand is subjected, as well as the depiction of skilful and imaginary terrors evoked by darkness and solitude have quite a Gothic tone. Nine years after Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom* appeared, another work which announces the immediate birth of Gothicism, was Rev. Thomas Leland's *Longsword of Salisbury, A Historical Romance* (1762). It has all the ingredients of Gothic–Historical Romance except supernatural machinery. This work may have given Walpole the impulse to write *The Castle of Otranto*, but it certainly influenced Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*.

Thus the Gothic romance did not spring fully-grown and armed from *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole merely outstripped a gradual accumulation of influences, which would eventually have brought about the birth of something resembling Gothic literature. He provided a tradition, a legacy.

The Graveyard poetry which flourished in the first half of the Eighteenth century had all the attributes which would eventually term it as Gothic literature. The Graveyard School's principle poetic objects which became staples in Gothic literature, other than graves and churchyards, were night, ruins, death and ghosts. For Blair death elevates one's consideration to higher, spiritual objects and ends:

Thrice welcome Death!
That after many a painful bleeding step
Conducts us to our Home, and lands us safe
On the long-wish'd for shore

(The Grave, 11.706-709)

Graveyard poetry was an exploration into man's fascination with the origins of death. In search for an explanation of man's ultimate end, came a writing that focused on death, darkness, spirituality and those sublime images that were both beautiful and frightening in the eyes of the mortal. It was the intent of these poets to introduce the end of life as a welcome beginning to a spiritual existence that was both glorified and feared.
The Graveyard poets’ influence on the literary Gothic movement of the mid-to-late Eighteenth century is explained as follows:

These attractions of darkness are among the foremost characteristics of Gothic works. They marked the limits necessary to the constitution of an enlightened world and delineated the limitations of neoclassical perceptions. Darkness, metaphorically, threatened the light of reason with what it did not know. Gloom cast perceptions of formal order and unified design into obscurity; its uncertainty generated both a sense of mystery and passions and emotions alien to reason. Night gave free reign to imagination’s unnatural and marvellous creatures, while ruins testified to a temporality that exceeded rational understanding and human finitude. These were the thoughts conjured up by Graveyard poets.

Graveyard poets are thought to be the founding artists of the literary Gothic movement. Their deathly influences helped to establish the Gothic tradition that readers have come to know from reading Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and William Faulkner’s modern-day portrayal of Southern Gothic literature. These poets are credited for the Gothic’s emergence into the literary medium. It is worthwhile going into Graveyard poetry in some detail for several reasons: because its involvement with death and suffering prefigures the Gothic novel; because it marks an early stage of the renewed desire for literary novelty which characterised the later part of the century; because it challenges rationalism and vaunts extremity of feeling; and because its actual influence on Gothic fiction was considerable. It exerted an enormous influence on German writers of terror-fiction, and through them retained an influence in England well into the 1790s and beyond.

Some of the major works of the poets belonging to the Graveyard school of poetry are Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (came out between 1742 and 1745); Robert Blair’s *The Grave* in 1743; James Hervey’s major work, *Meditations among the Tombs* (came out 1745 and 1747); Thomas Warton’s work *On the Pleasure of Melancholy* in 1747; and Gray’s famous *Elegy* in 1751.
In Young's *Night Thoughts*, the contemplation of death and decay serves to encourage speculation on the life to come. Fear of mortality and associated superstitions are unwarranted if one has faith. *Night Thoughts* is organised by a play of images, which double the significance of life and death, light and dark. For Young, the life of the body entombs the soul in darkness, while death and darkness enable the appreciation of a transcendent and immanent brilliance. It is for these reasons that night and darkness are so valued: “Darkness has more Divinity for me / It strikes thought inward, it drives back the soul / To settle on Herself, our Point Supreme?” (The Grave, V, 128-30).

The sublime, a notion in aesthetic and literary theory is a striking grandeur of thought and emotion. Longinus defines literary sublimity as “excellence in language”, the “expression of a great spirit”, and the power to provoke “ecstasy”. His conception of the sublime had its heyday in English criticism in the late seventeenth century to the middle eighteenth century, and over time its meaning extended to include not only literature, but any aesthetic phenomenon—even including nature itself, particularly mountains or desolate and striking landscapes - that produced sensations of awe or even of pain in its audience.

The most important English work on the sublime is Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). It was the most ambitious and methodical consideration of the sublime yet published. According to Burke, the sublime is a “state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” and “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other”. The relevance of Burke's *Enquiry* to Walpole’s experiments with romance is the emphasis on terror as the ‘ruling principle’ of the sublime. Walpole picks up the idea in the first preface to Otranto: “Terror, the author’s principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions”.

The importance of Burke’s treatise to Gothic writing may be seen as the first attempt to systematise a connection between sublimity and terror.

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible subjects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.

The details of Burke’s analysis have great relevance for the Gothic writers - in particular his emphasis on obscurity, vastness, and magnificence as constitutive elements of the sublime. But his most important contribution was to confer on terror a major and worthwhile literary role.

Thus many of the Gothic writers were heavily influenced by the cult of sublimity as represented by Longinus, Young and Edmund Burke’s *Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756).

Critics have found examples of the literary sublime in the Bible and in Shakespeare, but for most of the eighteenth century, Milton was the author who best embodied sublimity, especially in *Paradise Lost*. Sublimity became a central concern not only in eighteenth-century criticism, but in eighteenth-century literature, especially in the works of the so-called Pre-Romantic Poets - Thomas Gray, William Collins and in the works of Gothic novelists - Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis. The most important late eighteenth century work of the sublime is *Kant’s Critique of Judgement* (1790), which influenced early 19th century English thought on the subject.

The sublime enlarges the mind; makes it aware of its power (in the sense, it is related to romantic ideal of individualism and the political ideal of freedom and independence). Most frequent examples of the natural sublime are mountains, deserts, seas and oceans etc. and most frequent examples of the architectural sublime are Gothic cathedrals, castles and ruins of these we have abundant representation and usage in Gothic literature.
The Castle of Otranto (1764) was one of various attempts in Gothic fiction to cut a new path in literature by looking back to the past; the poets William Collins, Edward Young, Walpole's friend Thomas Gray, and the fabricator of "Ossian," James Macherson, were all important innovators of this kind.

However, it is important to make note of two important works of literary history that appeared in the decade preceding Otranto: Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser (1754; enlarged edition 1762) by Thomas Warton and Letters on Chivalry and Romance (1762) by Richard Hurd. Both stressed that medieval romances should be seen as the product of their times and both took a particular interest in the customs of chivalry as a foundation for romance. Warton interpreted the fanciful and supernatural elements in romance as allegories of social realities, a point taken up by Hurd also.

The historicist approach of Warton and Hurd informs Walpole's treatment of the relation between the medieval setting and manifestations of the supernatural. Hurd had speculated that tales of enchantment "shadowed out" the class conflict of their times; "oppressive feudal lords" were imaginatively transposed by the peasantry into fictional giants, "and every Lord was to be met with, like the Giant, in his strong hold, or castle"^22. In Otranto too, exaggerated fantasy is the natural outgrowth of the violent appropriation of power. The benevolent Prince Alfonso, we discover, was murdered by his chamberlain Ricardo, the line of succession has been perverted, and two generations later Alfonso has returned as a spectral giant to reclaim the property for his own descendant.

The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods, distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing. In many ways the multiple origins of Gothic writing highlight its diverse composition. While certain devices and plots, what
might be called the staples of the Gothic, are clearly identifiable in early Gothic texts, the tradition mainly draws on the medieval romances, supernatural, Faustian and fairy tales, Renaissance drama, sentimental, picaresque and confessional narratives as well as the ruins, tombs and nocturnal speculations that fascinated Graveyard poets.

The Gothic novel owes much to these developments. The marvelous incidents and chivalric customs of romances, the descriptions of wild and elemental natural settings, the gloom of the graveyard and ruin, the scale and permanence of the architecture, the terror and wonder of the sublime, all become important features of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel to provide an important stimulus to the imaginative aspirations of Gothic fiction.

Gothic and Romantic Poets:

The Gothic novelists contributed some vital components of romanticism. The matter, style, and spirit of Gothic romance, its images, themes, characters, and settings transformed into the finer elements of Romantic poetry.

David Punter writes:

In looking at the Gothic Fiction of the 1790s, it is important to keep in mind that this was not a strange outcropping of one particular literary genre, but a form into which a huge variety of cultural influences, from Shakespeare to 'Ossian', from medievalism to Celtic nationalism, flowed. And one concomitant of this is that most of the major writers of the period 1770 to 1820 - which is to say, most of the major poets of that period - were strongly affected by Gothic in one form or another. And this was not merely a passive reception of influence: Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats all played a part in shaping the Gothic, in articulating a set of images of terror which were to exercise a potent influence over later literary history.^[23]

At the outset one notices certain startling resemblances between Gothic fiction and the canon of Romantic poetry: the philosophy of composition, the portrayal of the chief character in the story and the treatment of external nature, are all alike. There may well be a connection between the Romantic Philosophy
of composition as embodied in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and the Gothic philosophy set down by Walpole thirty-four years before. In both Gothic and Romantic creeds there is a marked tendency to slip imperceptibly from the real into the other world, to destroy the barriers between the physical and the spiritual.
Notes:


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


10. Ibid. p. 116.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid. p. 117.


