



# Comparative Re-evaluation of Gothic Genre through Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*.

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## **Abstract:**

In English literature, there is a fairly broad classification of the gothic genre. The study delves into the consequences of Julia Kristeva's 'Power of Horror' theory in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the Gothic genre. The present research compares the themes of historical and contemporary Gothic literature, showing how gothic genres thematically vary with time. The initial gothic novels were mostly concerned with exaggerated thriller and horror themes, such as monsters, demons, and supernatural evils. The emphasis of the current gothic novels is primarily based on social issues of exploitation, subjection, and suffering for weaker groups of people. The contemporary gothic novels began to shape from real criminal cases or actual life events, compared to the superstitious and convictions in traditional ones. The criticism of local social views, race, politics, gender, and religion that characterizes contemporary Gothic literature is combined with aspects of the paranormal, magic realism, and satire. The writers and artists of Gothic literature altered the Gothic subgenre by including certain characteristics like mystery, darkness, and obscured areas. The exaggerated romances of the traditional gothic novels were given less emphasis in their contemporaneity while seeking to examine psychological insights. Gothic writers began to develop their emotional impacts through the gothic aspects, which allowed gothic literature to offer a fitting atmosphere that corresponded within the genre. This article attempts to present an overview of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) from past gothic novels and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) as contemporary classic gothic novels, contrasting thematically how they developed.

## **Keywords:**

Gothic literature, Past, Contemporary, Sensibility, Feminism, Post Colonialism, Consequences.

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**1-Introduction:**

Gothic literature has been expended greatly since the eighteenth century, despite having its origins in the twelfth century. The term 'Goths' refers to the barbarian tribes, a group of east Germanic people known for their late historic conquest of the western Roman Empire and the subsequent foundation of successor states in Italy and Spain. The Crimean Goths, who were the last of the gothic groups in Crimea, survived for many centuries, even though the Goths as a distinct ethnic group became extinct. The Gothic genre's identity is derived from the Goth subculture. Dark attire in the gothic style, black-dyed hair, and wearing dark makeup were popular in gothic fashion. Gothic as a genre emerged as a protest against the neoclassical era's limitations and rigidity. The resurgence of this genre, which examined medieval romance, posed a challenge to neoclassical literature's emphasis on intellect and reason as well as its emphasis on standards that must be obeyed. The appetite for romance that was absent in the Augustan Age had become very strong. These bohemian writers examined unembellished feelings, emotions, and imaginations. By highlighting the themes of passion, sadness, and terror, these authors created a new taste. The Romantic Era saw a flourishing of the gothic literature genre. While many writers attempted to write in this style to create terrifying suspense novels that expanded their writing, the author sought the gothic genre. They combined romanticism with gothic elements to provide their readers with a more thrilling and dramatic experience. Gothic literature comprises ghost and horror tales, suspenseful fiction, mystery, and thriller publications, as well as other contemporary works that emphasise mystery, shock, and sensation. The Gothic

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setting, which includes castles, ancient palaces, shattered windows, yellowish walls, and horrific, scary animal voices, creates a genuine impression. The Gothic genre was first mentioned in Horace Walpole's 1765 novel, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. This features a love-based theme, horror, curses, gothic-style mansions, and palaces. Later contributors to the eighteenth century were pioneers of gothic fiction. Ann Radcliffe, who wrote *Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794, based it on the themes of entrapment, excessive wealth, romance, death and sadness, the possibility of a supernatural presence, a foreboding atmosphere, a scary old castle, and gothic villains. An

English novelist and dramatist, Matthew Gregory Lewis, who wrote Gothic horror *The Monk: A Romance* in 1796, created it using the same principles as *The Castle of Otranto*, which had a violent and explicit motif of anti-Catholicism, pride, men and women, and emphasised romance. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the gothic genre demonstrates the supernatural thriller aspect drawn from ancient fairy tales and the Bible's writing. When Mary Shelley authored *Frankenstein* in 1818, it was called the Second Wave of the Gothic genre, and she introduced the new science fiction. *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a novel by Charles Martin, first published in 1820, tells the tale of a scholar who sold his soul to the devil, and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, a short novel by Washington Irving, tells the tale of Ichabod, a young man who firmly believes in the supernatural and the ghosts and who enjoys telling tales of the headless horse. Others begin to believe in his actual dread because of his supernatural beliefs. Gothic literature is all about the storylines and supernatural themes, as well as the dark background, fear, and haunting of the environment. Romantic writers gave the gothic genre a vigorous start. Even though both feature powerful palaces, terrifying locations, aliens, and supernatural elements, there is a significant contrast between the two genres. Gothic is regarded as a terror to grow,

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while science fiction contains a small amount of realism, which makes it solicitous. Atrocity, inflated characters, and a melancholy atmosphere are the foundations of Victorian Gothic literature. Atavism, which was preferred by the Victorians, is frequently seen in the figures of the gothic genre. Criminal activities, domestic abuse, violence, and murder are their prominent topics. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte is an idealized example of a Victorian Gothic book. *Wuthering Heights*, a book written by her sister Emily Bronte and regarded as one of the best English novels ever written, questions Victorian ethical standards and the hierarchy of class. The Gothic genre has evolved since its inception, when it initially focused on supernatural elements like monsters, devils, and other made-up creatures. Today's writers have mostly concentrated on illustrating to society the struggles that characters have had and how they overcome them in life. Readers should consider the challenges that characters have faced that are essentially unknown to other characters because they were revealed by the ghost of that character, who appeared after his death to reveal their true history. The horror of World War I and the uprising at its depths are dealt with in the Modern Gothic book as a contemporary ghost story. *Rebecca: Introduction by Lucy*, a modern gothic book by Daphne du

Maurier published in 1938, shows crimes, mysteriousness, and romanticism as modern concerns. One of the best examples of a contemporary gothic book is Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which chronicles the American Civil War era. The evolution of the Gothic genre was influenced by modernism, postmodernism, colonialism, and feminism during the twentieth century. The gothic genre typically flourished when the decade transitioned from the past to the present, as fictitious social conditions were replaced by real ones. The following are the themes from the novels:

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### Gothic Sensibility:

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is a prototypical gothic structure that features aesthetics, enigmatic mysteries, and surroundings. Yorkshire, a region in northern England, serves as the backdrop for *Wuthering Heights*. The majority of this region is comprised of moors, which are large, wild, and high yet rather damp and barren. Stormy, adverse weather is also a dominant feature of the setting. Lockwood's character in the novel describes the term 'Wuthering' as:

*"Wuthering" being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones. (Bronte 6).*

The terrifying aspect, if depicted in the narrative, is the lightning and thunder during a thunderstorm, which describes the horrifying look of *Wuthering Heights*. Unsettling weather is a sign of the terror in the novel. The ghost of Catherine, violent, dark, spooky, unpleasant, and intense emotions that cause dreadful things to happen, and death are the gothic narrative components in *Wuthering Heights*. The deaths of numerous characters like Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine, Linton, Hindley, Heathcliff, and Isabella highlight the gothic aspects. As opposed to this gothic setting of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the house in which Sethe and her daughter Denver lived was at 124 Bluestone Road. The ghost of Sethe's dead daughter haunts their house

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and is an essential component in the plot's developments. In the truest sense, Sethe's house at 124, Bluestone Road is a haunted house since Sethe's first daughter ghost frequently makes herself known by throwing objects and creating other disturbances. The house also represents physical misdeeds committed in the past as the location of Sethe's daughter's murder. But *Beloved* is much more complex than a straightforward tale about a haunted house. A typical gothic theme involves a mysterious stranger or someone distantly related who emerges out of nowhere. Sethe assumes that she is the physical representation of her deceased daughter. Morrison uses gothic elements in her novel *Beloved* to talk about the tragedies of racism and enslavement in the actual world.

### Psychological State:

Psychological behavior is molded by their psychological state, which is defined as their set of thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and attitudes. Julia Kristeva wrote a book titled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in 1980. The term "abject" refers to the human response (horror) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, or between the self and the other. As Kristeva states: "It is thus, not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules" (232). Kristeva claims that the abject marks a "primal order" that escapes signification in the symbolic order. In *Wuthering Heights*, the class disparity illustrates the psychological frame of mind that Catherine and Heathcliff were dealing with. Instead of getting married to Heathcliff, Catherine opts for marriage to Edgar Linton of Thrushcross Grange in order to advance her social status. She has been driven by her selfish desire for authority and

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security. She regrets getting married because she adores Heathcliff. Class discrimination is shown in the character's behaviors. Heathcliff's persona stands in for the mind that is entirely motivated by emotions and utter selfishness. He did this as a result of being mistreated and ignored by everyone because of his class. It demonstrates how diversely people live in *Wuthering Heights* and Thrush Cross Grange at all social class levels. Bronte illustrates the idea that class is something that originates with heritage by focusing on how an immigrant, Heathcliff, gets treated

as he meets an unfamiliar culture with a shifting class structure. Discrimination based on class has an effect on people's mental thinking as well. Morrison's *Beloved* shows slavery as the moral dilemma at the center of the conflicts. Due to Sethe's experience with slavery, she killed their daughter to prevent her from going through the same situation. Featuring a ghostly figure who appeared to be Beloved, a two-year-old daughter whom her mother killed to save her, the anguish endured by the protagonists, and the effects of slavery as they are depicted in the book

*"What I had to get through because of you. Passed right by those boys hanging in the tree" (Morrison 98)*

Sethe and Beloved were both psychologically affected. Sethe spent her entire life feeling convicted and was unable to forgive herself for killing her young daughter. The infant's spirit Beloved, after twenty years, arrived to learn why her mother killed her when she was a two-year-old infant. Beloved, however, is more than simply the infant; she also stands for other symbols of suffering. Bronte depicts the psychological effects of slavery on the characters throughout the novel *Beloved*.

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### **Post colonialism:**

Emily Bronte's eighteenth-century classic *Wuthering Heights* paints a vivid picture of class division, prejudice, love, and the battle to accomplish the American Dream. The socio-economic class starts to take shape as a result of numerous immigrants from different nations. Heathcliff, an orphan kid, strives to find his place in an upper-class family in *Wuthering Heights*. The persona of Heathcliff, who fled to live his ideal life, he likewise failed in his attempts to exact revenge and overcome his feelings of failure. He desired to marry Catherine, who had feelings for Heathcliff as well, but she chose Edgar because he comes from an upper-class background like her own. Heathcliff portrays the situation during the period when immigrants struggled to secure their rights to a decent standard of living, illuminating class inequality. Heathcliff, who aspires to fame and fortune in every way possible and thus loses his own identity in the process, is a representation of how an immigrant loses their identity and culture when they become like all of them. In Morrison's *Beloved*, when Sethe discusses her childhood with the spirit of Beloved, she misplaces the language she was taught as a child, which was her native language.

*“She believed that must be why she remembered so little before sweet home expects singing and dancing and how crowded it was. What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma’am spoke, and which would never come back” (Morrison 31)*

It depicts the loss of culture suffered by the immigrants. Since no one was embracing Sethe as she was, they likewise had to lose their individuality to blend in with society. Loss of

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culture revealed the effects of colonial upheaval, including invasion, alienation, and disorientation. Sethe is struggling to deal with losing connections to her culture.

### **Gothic Feminism:**

Gothic feminism approaches women’s literature from a neo-feminist perspective; it provides an unconventional view of feminism as a literary theology and innovative approaches to this genre. In the work *Female Gothic: Then and Now*, Moers' interpretation of female Gothic was highly influential, as stated by Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace, supporting this assertion. “Moers’ analysis of female Gothic was extremely influential. It not only engendered a body of critical work that focused on the ways in which the female Gothic articulated women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal society... but placed the Gothic at the center of the female tradition” (Smith & Wallace 1). Ellen Moers first used the term female Gothic in *Literary Women* in 1976. The importance of the Female Gothic, as expressed by Moers' incorporation of female writers, their writings, and characters, as well as her application of feminist philosophy to the text theorist believes that year later, it was valued. *Wuthering Heights* is seen as a representational work of the Victoria era. It is a romantic triangle plot between Catherine, Edgar, and Heathcliff. Women in the Victorian era were viewed as fragile and frail. Catherine’s character represents the oppressed women of Victorian society. Catherine is proud, independent, and nasty rather than a lovely, sweet, and kind lady like Isabella. Catherine is a rebel against oppression in her courageous and tireless desire for real love.

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*“At fifteen, Catherine was the queen of countryside; she had no peer; and she did turn out a naughty, headstrong creature! I own I did not like her, after her infancy was past; and I vexed her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance” (Bronte 94)*

She discusses the conflict among Victorian women, who yearn for both freedom and true love. Considering their concern about losing her independence and privileges, she feels a great deal of depression and uneasiness. The novel *Beloved* is marked by discrimination, female oppression, and the effects of slavery. Sethe is ecstatic to realize that Beloved is the daughter she killed. She started taking care of Beloved all her time. But Beloved gets irate and invasive. Sethe starts to eat very little, and Beloved gains weight and assumes the shape of a pregnant lady. Denver notes that when Sethe's and Beloved's voices blend until they are unrecognizable, Sethe starts to sound more like a child and Beloved more like the mother. Beloved's character depicts all the persecution her family experiences, and her ghost strives to convey the struggles she endured in her childhood. Morrison creates the ideal Gothic female archetype in the figure of Beloved, illuminating the hidden realities of society and the issues faced by women.

## Conclusion

The gothic genre, which originated in the romantic era of the 18th century, is constantly evolving and becoming more and more realistic. This article makes it rather evident that Gothic has evolved significantly over time. Novels from the present era are better suited to depict society's uniqueness. While analyzing Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, it was concluded that the gothic genre of the 18th century is more closely associated with romanticism and supernatural themes. The novel depicts a terrifying atmosphere, the possibility of paranormal

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activity, and the incursion of the past haunting the present as Catherine's ghost appears to fulfill her desires. Past gothic characteristics include several death states, strange sounds or silences, revealing of unknown family relationships, cryptic writings, dark scenes, and dreams that reflect the spirit's yearning, which this novel demonstrates quite well. Gothic literature is written realistically in the contemporary; it speaks not just about romanticism but also about the state of society at the moment. Sethe's character is a representative of black

community suffrage in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, which takes place during the Civil Rights Movement. The black community faces challenges as Sethe and her daughter in the novel. A Gothic novel from the past is not written with the same realism as one from now. However, a new Gothic style arose at the end of the nineteenth century. These novels centered on the urban present and reframed modern issues through the prism of horror fiction.

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