



العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية لأدب الماورائيات البريطاني والأمريكي في القرن التاسع عشر

## Social and Cultural Influences of Nineteenth Century British and American Supernatural Fiction

**Areej Mohammed Mubarak Ali**

*Researcher, Department of English,  
Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Sana'a University - Yemen*

**أريج محمد مبارك علي**

*باحثه - قسم اللغة الإنجليزية  
كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية - جامعة صنعاء - اليمن*

**الملخص:**

قد يبدو أدب الماورائيات للوهلة الأولى مقتصرًا على بث المتعة وإثارة الرعب والغموض في عقول القراء المفتونين بعالم ما وراء الطبيعة، إلا أن هذا الصنف الأدبي لا يقتصر على الرعب كعنصر أساسي في تكوينه بمعزلٍ عن الاتجاهات والنزعات الثقافية والسياسية والعلمية الأخرى الملازمة لظهور أدب الماورائيات بنوعيه الإنجليزي والأمريكي وازدهاره في القرن التاسع عشر. يسعى هذا البحث لتحليل المكونات الأساسية التي شكلت أدب الماورائيات في القرن التاسع عشر وربطها بفلسفة (الشك) بأشكالها وأبعادها المختلفة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** ما وراء الطبيعة، الشك، الحالة الثقافية، أدب، فلسفة.

**Abstract:**

Apart from fascinating readers with the charm of mystery and bewilderment, nineteenth-century supernatural fiction proved to be skeptic about certain social and religious issues of that era. Supernaturalist fiction may seem at first sight confined to the purpose of entertaining readers by creating excitement and mystery among readers fascinated with imagination and supernaturalism. The truth is that supernatural fiction is not only confined to 'Horror' as a main ingredient in its formation. It is rather made of a combination of several cultural, political, and scientific elements which coincided with the emergence and flourishing of the supernatural fiction during the nineteenth century. This study aims to analyze the different trends and elements which formed nineteenth century British and American supernatural fiction and investigate how they relate to "skepticism" with its various forms and dimensions.

**Keywords:** Supernaturalism, Skepticism, Cultural Situation, Fiction, Philosophy.

**Introduction:**

The existence of supernatural elements in literature creates different reactions and attitudes. On the one hand, we have the strong believers of this inexplicable, and unseen world, those who adopt and adhere to such beliefs. On the other hand, we have the total opposite: the fierce attackers, the disbelievers who refuse to believe in such concepts and world. In between these two categories, we have an intermediate reaction in which the reader finds himself/herself swinging between faith and doubt – between the desire to believe and know more, and the decision to reject and deny. This situation of confusion is called incertitude or uncertainty and it is likely to be classified as a form of "skepticism". *Skepticism* is not far from supernatural fiction where no certainty is found. It takes more than one form and it exists in more than one context. For example, it can be seen as an attitude of *doubt* and criticism for certain concepts and phenomena, or a situation of uncertainty, and in some other cases, it is an example of ignorance

where the person needs to learn and know more about the metaphysical world which defies logic and law of nature.

**Objectives of the Study:**

1. To analyze the major cultural influences which formed both British and American supernatural fiction highlighting the connection between supernatural fiction and skepticism.
2. To investigate how "skepticism" relates to supernatural fiction.

**Rationale**

Supernatural literature connects the reader to a world of mystery and bewilderment raising questions and sometimes "doubts" about the essence of this world. Such literary works tend to emphasize the possibility of the existence of vague worlds and issues beyond human reason and knowledge. However, this possibility remains a "hypothesis" because it is always accompanied by a feeling of "uncertainty" which raises our doubts and made us *skeptical* about the existence and reality of this world.

Analyzing Gothic fiction from the point of view of its connection to “Skepticism’ is the instrument used to fulfill the objectives of this research. This study argues that *Skepticism* is not far from the Gothic literary works, it intends to investigate and compare the existence of “skepticism” in four gothic works. Each case of skepticism differs from the other in its form, the circumstances that created it, the purpose behind using it, and the conclusion it ends in. So, analyzing ‘Skepticism’, its existence, different forms and contexts, and connection to Gothic fiction is the main motive of this research.

#### **Research Method:**

This study follows an analytic method which attempts to analyze the forming elements of both British and American Supernatural fiction and investigate how they relate to “Skepticism”.

#### **A: British Supernatural fiction: Nineteenth Century English Gothic (Supernatural) literature ideology:**

The quality of “Gothicism” of the nineteenth century English gothic fiction consists of the combination of more than one component. Other than the supernatural elements of horror; the nineteenth century gothic literary works are constructed in a heterogenous design made by combining various ideas and methods which are influenced by a number of cultural, intellectual, and social contexts, and which also reflect the mindset and spirit of the age. Depending on the fact that literary works usually mirror the environment from which they come, one can say that nineteenth century English Gothic fiction is formed by the combination of three *main* elements:

- 1- Romanticism
- 2- Religion
- 3- Enlightenment

#### **1- Romanticism:**

There is a close relationship between Romanticism and Gothicism. This relationship is not merely confined to the literary production; because the existence of “Gothicism” in the late eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century English society took more than one form. Gothicism presence in the English society first began as a

literary genre, but it later created further analogies in politics and architecture. A detailed analysis of the English society at that time would reveal a *Gothic* presence in some aspects in life and culture at that time. The period of the mid-1770s until at least early 1830s was seen as “gothic” because it had a set of literary and social practices and views that might be called gothic.

“The infiltration of Gothicism into the discourses of literature, architecture and politics, and its osmotic passage between the discourses, makes it possible to speak of early – nineteenth -century British culture as at large as a Gothic Culture” (Duggett 8).

The Gothic horror function is an extension of the Romantic aim of creating literary pleasure. It had an influential role and impact on the Romantic poetry which was influenced by Gothic settings and tropes. (Most of the Romantic writers exploited the vogue of gothic fiction and drama, that the gothic fiction is considered an offshoot of the romantic era) These influences continued until the early nineteenth century which had a gothic phase in its production.

Several Romantic writers participated in this phase producing notable works: Coleridge’s *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* 1798, Byron’s *Manfred* 1817, Keats’ *Lamia* 1819, Shelley’s *Zastrozzi : A Romance* 1810, Coleridge’s *Christable* 1797-98, Baillie’s *De Montfrot* 1798, Wordsworth’s *Fragments of a Gothic tale* 1797, *Supernatural Ballads* (1798-1800), Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1818). Gothic writing provides Romantic writers with a convenient medium by which they can portray weird experiences and bizarre places in addition to themes such as death, sin, and guilt. It also helps them to use aesthetics such as the use of sublime and imagery. Most of the Romantic poets were not only influenced by Gothic writing but they played a part in shaping and evolving the Gothic culture.

“Most of the major writers of the period 1770 - 1820, which is to say, most of the major poets of that period were strongly affected by Gothic in one form or another. This was not merely a passive reception or 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” (Gamer 7).

Romantic writers and poets used the gothic elements to express their themes and purposes. They exploited the numerous uses and implications that Gothic writing has. For example, William Blake used the political inflections that the gothic discourse carries, to express and discuss the theme of tyranny in his *The French Revolution* (1791). Another use of the Gothic element by Romantic writers is by Coleridge in describing his psychological mood. Coleridge’s works are a blend of Romantic and Gothic principles. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge states that he relies on his ability to make his readers “suspend their disbelief of supernatural elements he described are in fact real” For example *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Christabel*.

Gothicism is also used by Gray and Young as a background of meditations on history linked to the key Gothic theme of ruin, such as the Ossianic poetic prose and Anna and Harland (1790), Alice du close (1828). Since Gothic writing is somehow related to Medieval times, Byron used it to show a sense of aristocratic nostalgia related to old times, such as *Lara* (1814). The same inclination was shown by Keats who was interested in old times and who used Gothic elements to refer to the older world of modern chivalry.

Yet, in spite of the clear resemblance and close connection between Romanticism and Gothicism, the attitude of Romantic poets and writers was ambivalent towards gothic fiction. They tended to treat it as an inferior type of literature. They agreed with the general opinion of the periodical literature which dominated the decade and condemned Gothic texts as “debased productions pernicious to the taste and morality of the British nation” (Gamer 10). The driving force of the negative attitude of Romantic poets and writers was Wordsworth’s ideas stated in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* where he emphasized his antagonism to Gothic writing. However, despite this fact, it is hard to deny the strong connection between Romanticism and Gothicism as we explained. So, it is a bit ambivalent and disturbing that the

same Romantic writers who have always revealed their negative attitude are the same ones who adopted the gothic style, read much gothic literature and contributed to producing important literary works. Not only that, but the first generation of the Romantic writers helped in creating a wider gothic culture and created a pure gothic in literature which allowed later for the rise of Romantic/Gothic. The gothic literature affected Romantic writing from another angle. The dynamics of Gothic literature reception in the 1790s and 1800s were of great impact on Romanticism. The end of the eighteenth century was a period of conflict between popular and critical audiences in Britain.

Gothic was popular among readers but it was despised by critics. Its unexpected popularity and unanimous contempt produced a cultural predicament. The cultural situation of the gothic in this period played an important role in the economic behavior of the writers. The Gothic was an attractive topic for the writers who want readers or seek wider readership. This is probably one of the reasons which made the Romantic readers first borrow then appropriate Gothic elements in their literary production. To attract readers and at the same time transform these elements, they appropriated them to be more valued to satisfy the critics. So, the popular reception of the Gothic was shaped more than the circumstances under which gothic conventions and motifs were used in Romanticism.

## 2- Religion:

Religion has always represented an important element of Gothic writing. Although appeared in the age of reason, Neo-classical literature includes elements of emotions and religion, and gothic fiction is an example of this. There is always an intersection between religion and gothic writing. Alison Milbank in *Review of God and The Gothic: Religion, Romance, and Reality in the English Literary Tradition*, says that the core function of this type of writing is a kind of imaginative, religious imaginative and religious meditation that emerged due to the breaks with the Roman Catholic church and the absence of an ecclesiastical structure that could meditate between God and humanity cultural

forms emerged which could fulfill that meditating function.

The existence of Religion in Gothic writing takes place according to different circumstances and factors. It can be seen as a response to the cultural and social situation of the age. The first emergence of Gothic writing was regarded as an English protestant phenomenon. It took place in the late seventeenth century, and it was affected by the denouncement of supernatural manifestation and the church emphasis on moral and rational Christine doctrine. The existence of religion in Gothic writing took more than one aspect such as Reformation, Catholicism and Secularization.

The basic presence of religion in gothic writing is clear from its use as a religious histography, i.e. as a reference to some religious historical events in Europe such as the crusades or the inquisitions. However, this simple use of Religion in Gothic writing changed and evolved during the natural evolvement of the Gothic literature. The position of Religion changed and took different aspects during the time, according to different social and cultural factors. For example, during the age of reason, the eighteenth century, the main aim to apply religion in Gothic writing was to criticize and emphasize the corruption of the catholic church, and this goes along with the main protestant direction of fighting irrational and supernatural ideas.

“The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries have been recognized as, in all essentials, dominated by a strict concept of religion and reduced the Deity to a clockwork prime mover of the universe.” Within the same atmosphere and the prevailing of rationalism, the Gothic novel was seen as a part of a process of secularization in literature because it supported the reformation agenda in denouncing the supernaturalism of medieval church as superstitions.

“Gothic explored many taboos: religious profanities, demonism occultism, necromancy and incest. This can be interpreted as a dark side of Enlightenment freethinking or persistence of an increasingly excluded occultist tradition in western culture, one which paradoxically insisted on an acknowledgment of the

continuing existence of magic, religious, and demonic forces within a more and more secular society (Smith 3).

On the other hand, there were some dissenter voices which criticized the attack on the religious rites and beliefs. These voices also appropriated the Gothic writing to satisfy their aims which use the gothic novel as a revival against rationalism and materialism.

“There was a value in the stimulation of emotions of religious awe through means later associated with the Gothic novel and both subordinated or contained the numinous within a matrix of key beliefs which are listed as: existence of God, providence, immortality and future rewards and punishments” (Geary 11). So, the reaction towards it in the gothic novels differ according to different circumstances and factors, but, in any case, the existence of religion is strongly felt in most of the gothic literary works, and it can be traced in the existence of two main points:

- a- Catholicism
- b- Reformation:

#### I. **Catholicism:**

The representation of Catholicism and Roman church in gothic literature varies according to the political and social climate it appears in. Most of the enlightened gothic writers put Catholicism under sever attack and criticism and they consider it a source of superstitious thinking and corrupted practices. However, the same Gothic works which attack Catholicism, include glimpses of fair or neutral assessments of Catholicism in their literary works. The positive representation of Catholicism in Gothic literature was a part of a wider acceptance and tolerance of it in the whole country. The English society was prepared to have a counter-revolutionary mood and that was reflected in the Gothic production of the period, because the eighteenth-century politics created a new attitude towards Catholicism marked by sympathy instead of the previous antipathy which existed for a long time in the English society.

At the beginning of the Georgian era (1714-1837), there was a hostility to the religious minority part of which were the Catholics. Things got more complicated after the Gordon

Riots in London (1780) which were motivated by anti-Catholic sentiments and were directed against Catholics after the Papist Act of (1778) removed some of their legal disabilities. For example, the Papist Act (1778) intended to reduce the official discrimination against Catholics and it allowed them join the British army. The atmosphere continued to develop in favor of Catholicism and culminated to making further more important procedures like the Oxford Movement in the 1830s which aimed to renew Catholic thought and practice within the Church of England in spite of the protestant oppositions. On the other hand, all the French clergy who were persecuted in France because of the French revolution immigrated to England where they found more sympathy and this helped to enhance the attitude of tolerating and accepting Catholicism.

So, a number of political and social factors helped to create a pro-Catholic climate and this was reflected in the gothic writing of the period. In the period between 1790 - 1816, most of the gothic novels were set in Catholic Europe and the reaction of readers was partially positive. These novels gave details of monastic life and catholic motives such as: church, nuns, abbots, convents, cloisters and other Catholic rituals and themes. The positive use of Catholicism in gothic novels was to create an exotic mysterious atmosphere and to evoke the medieval past, the Catholic rites were portrayed in a mystical manner by which we can feel a melancholy pleasure and a feeling of sublime which also creates a religious awe.

On the other hand, we find that the writers used the Catholic element as a fashion accessory and as a source to inspire sentimental imagination. Almost most of the early English Gothic novels borrowed themes and sentimental representations of monks, nuns, convents, monasteries, rites and practices of Catholicism. The pro-Catholic attitude in the gothic novels tends to romanticize the monastic life especially the use of *cloister theme*, a trend that emerged in France in the seventeenth century. The beginning of this trend was by the adaptation of a French sentimental tale by Joseph Addison, *Theodosius and Constantia* (1711), and a few years later by Alexander's Pope's romanticized version of the doomed

"Eloise" in *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717), who was forced into a religious vocation against her wishes.

The cloister theme includes the following points: Cloister setting (monastery - convent) and a monastic hero/ heroine who suffers in love; and enters the convent where he subdues his/her passion. Ann Radcliffe appropriated this theme in some of her novels. Although she is well known to represent convents and monastic life negatively, most of her heroines enter the convent, enjoy happiness and prefer to stay there. For example, Julia in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) enters the monastery of ST. Augustine first for the sake of protection and then she prefers to remain forever. Also, Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) retreats to the convent of ST. Clair.

Radcliffe's hostile attitude towards the Catholic church changes when she presents the concept of sanctuary; we find that her tone softens when she analyzes convents and monastic life. She tends to idealize and romanticize the sanctuary life where she adopts and confirms the idea that a religious house provides asylum for the persecuted or troubled. She describes the Catholic church as a place of benevolence and sympathy maybe as part of her female gothic ideology which was reflected in her constant representation of the convent as a refuge for women, or as a way to evoke nostalgia for the days of chivalry and Romance, a narrative trope which appeared in works such as, *Lusignan*; *The Abby of The Trappe* (1801), *The Monk of the Grotto* (1802) which romanticize the taking of the monastic vows.

A detailed example of romanticizing the monastic vows and sanctuary life is found in a *Sicilian Romance* (1790). It talks about Cornelia and Angelo whose marriage is thwarted. The marriage never happens, as a result, Angelo went to fight in a foreign country and Cornelia enters a convent after hearing that Angelo has been killed where she finds solace and lives happily. Catholicism was also used to evoke a sublime, in *An Essay on the Genius and Writing of Pope* (1756), Joseph Warton explains how Catholic rites and Catholic churches touched and moved the souls of both Catholics and non-Catholics and how it generated a feeling of awe. The Catholic

culture came back in Britain by others like Walpole who used Catholicism in a different way, as a fashion accessory by appropriating the gothic style of architecture.

## II. Reformation:

The deep antagonism between protestant Reformation and Catholicism found its roots in the ancient days of the sixteenth century during the reign of king Henry VIII Reformation which began in England as a religious movement supported by King Henry VIII who was affected by the general climate of Reformation in Europe, and by the ideas of European reformers as Martin Luther. King Henry's personal concerns about not having a royal heir, besides the positive impact of reformers such as Martin Luther, made him develop a new agenda which eventually helped over throw the authority of the pope and cut England from the Catholic Europe.

The gothic writing in the eighteenth century was marked by an anti-Catholic attitude. In fact, the gothic novel of that period was an arena by which the protestant enlightened writers expressed their antagonism to the Catholic church. Criticizing the irrationality and absurdity of the Catholic rites was an important element in the gothic novel of that period. The Gothic novel of the eighteenth century was a medium to reflect the protestant tradition of Catholicism antagonism and the protestant appreciation of rationality. Rationality became the core of the early gothic novels which subsequently created a new culture that denied idolatry and superstitions. A culture which was to repudiate a – long-standing system of magical beliefs, ghosts, witches, mysterious healing power of saints, confessions and other catholic beliefs and rites. The beginning was by pre-revolutionary anti-clerical French novels which were influenced by early British gothic works and writers as Mathew Lewis. The anti-clerical French works depicted ravaged nuns, licentious priests, and dark deeds in dismal abbeys. These novels discuss the Catholic atrocities and corruption. The gothic writers appropriated themes and motifs from the scandalous anti-Catholic tales developed by the seventeenth century German and French protestants controversialists, and

the sensationalism of the 1790s French drama under the revolution.

The famous examples of anti-Catholic works include Francois de Bacular'd's *Euphemie*, a monastic drama in which a young woman is forced into the convent after an unfortunate love affair to die miserably there. Another example is Mathews Lewis' *The Monk* where Lewis portrayed "Ambrosio" as a despicable man who commits the sins of rape, incest, sorcery, murder, and matricide, besides the deadly sins of lust, envy, greed, pride and wrath.

## 3- Enlightenment:

The eighteenth century was the period of literary and scientific progress when Europe was moving in steady steps towards modernization. It witnessed a rapid expansion of scientific progress which included expansion of print culture, increasing levels of literacy, performing new experiments and searching for new discoveries. Modernization was also realized by evolving new values such as universal human rights, individuality, loyalty, equality under the law, public education, freedom of choice, suffrage, toleration of religious and cultural differences, and equality between sexes.

The Enlightenment agenda drew on rejecting the archaic and superstitious beliefs of the past, and embracing a new method based on reason. Rationality and self-control, besides the values mentioned above were highly praised by the protestant (enlightened) individualism and they formed the heart of the Enlightenment culture. The formation of this mentality went along with the growth of science which was supported by the application of rational thought and scientific enquiry resulting in performing numerous experiments and challenging superstitions.

The connection between Enlightenment and Gothic fiction would likely be described as "Paradoxical" because the emergence of an irrational imaginary literary production at the heart of the age of reason is really confusing. The Enlightenment is an intellectual movement which instigates revolutionary developments in art, philosophy, literature and politics, and this contradicts the irrational spirit of the Gothic

writing. However, the clear paradox between the spirit of the age and the supernaturalism of gothic writing, does not mean that the rationality of the age did not influence the gothic production in the period. The Enlightened pro-scientific attitude influenced a number of Gothic novels which can be regarded as a support of the enlightened philosophy in prompting modernization and emphasizing on science.

The late period of the Gothic literature (1813-1838) responds to most of the enlightened ideals mentioned above, especially the appreciation of science. When Queen Victoria assumed the throne in 1838, the rise of this new queen monarchy coincided with both technological advances and popularity of Gothic works. These Gothic literary works reflected the empiricist philosophy which provided the basis for many cultural changes that took place during the enlightenment period. A number of gothic novels written at that time and after reflected the use of the empirical reasoning, materialism, industrialism and they also reflected a tendency towards rational secularization. *Frankenstein* (1818), *The invisible man* (1897), *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). These novels are examples of Gothic novels which represent the enlightenment spirit and echo the contemporary society marked by materialism and scientific progress.

#### 4- Secularization and Skepticism:

##### a- Secularization:

The Enlightenment period gave rise to further changes in social and religious views in the society. The elite and bourgeoisie of Enlightenment Europe, in the period between 1780 - 1850, sought to embrace secular ideas and ideologies such as self-control, nationalism, legal rights, civic values, scientific experimentation, mechanists' philosophy, and materialism. The novels written during this period developed these ideals, and the Gothic literature produced in this period was no exception. It is furthermore considered as a major component of the secularizing process because it embraces the future and attacks the past.

The eighteenth century produced a new fascination with modern epistemology and *secularization* can be considered as an extension and a result of the scientific enlightenment ideology. All these ideas challenged the concept of the universe that had been constructed by Christian belief. Instead, there were attempts to establish a new society based on epistemology issues such as realities of the matter, organic cycle of birth, and growth and decay. These issues endorsed the notion that the processes of life and matter occurred without recourse to a belief in the supernatural. (Belief in God).

At that time, Europe was in the grip of religious and political terror both before and after the French Revolution. So, by the 1780s, the philosophic movements in France had built an extremely strong stance against religion as a source of superstitions and the prop of political corruption. Hostility against religion appeared during the French revolution when deep feelings of humiliation and disrespect of religious symbols prevailed. This was reflected in taking some measures such as issuing the act of the national assembly on November, 2, 1789 to confiscate all the church property in order to pay off the national debt, and in incidents like the massacre of 1792, when the mobs slaughtered between two and three thousand prisoners, many of them were Christian priests.

Being influenced as different parts of Europe, England undertook a process of secularization which favored reason and science over religion. That was felt in the unwelcoming attitude towards religion and in the encouragement of the scientific progress. This agenda was applied in some gothic novels which developed negative associations of religious symbols and themes as part of the secularization process which focused on attacking religion represented in Catholic institutions and rites and even demonizing them.

"Secularization agreed with the Reformation in denouncing much of supernaturalism of the medieval church as superstition. Thus, most of the sacraments, nearly all holy objects and many rituals including the prayers to saints, the doctrine of purgatory all were eliminated as magical exercises. "(Geary 15).



Since the influence of science was strong, the Christian scholars and scientists were in trouble. They did not really want to follow religious teaching and explanation, and at the same time they did not want to adopt the idea of extolling a god who created the universe. So, they created their own system of Christian doctrine and new mechanical philosophy which explains the order and design of creation as the handiwork of God. The religious life was changed in England where the relationship between the church and the state weakened, new personal freedoms for faith were granted especially for minorities and ideas as “rational religion” which was based on personal experience and reflection, appeared. These changes caused clergymen to express their increasing fears regarding the new views on religion and people’s tendency to create an increasingly secular society. The Church attendance was in decline and there was evidence of increasing agnosticism and a rejection of some scriptural teachings besides that anti-clericalism of church ministries, also the rejection of religious authority emerged in some circles. Religion and personal faith were also subjected to the tides of reason, and personal judgements on matters of belief were given and discussed the thing which created a debate during the period and led to skepticism and sometimes bold atheism among the enlightened elite.

#### **b- Skepticism:**

*Skepticism* is the attitude of doubting knowledge in various areas. A skeptic, as the English translation of the Greek word “skeptikos” indicates, is “an inquirer”, someone who is unsatisfied and still looking for truth. He/she usually challenges the reliability of any claims of knowledge by asking what principles they are based upon. Skepticism is always an important part of any debate about knowledge and obtaining the truth. It is a method which uses doubts to seek and understand the truth about almost everything around us especially religious beliefs. Regarding religious skepticism, which is the most common type of skepticism, Socrates is one of its earliest religious skeptics who

questioned the legitimacy of the beliefs of his time in the existence of the Greek gods. Since then, a new philosophy has been formed with the purpose to doubt, question and inquire religious issues.

Religious skepticism questions religious authority and it does not mean to be anti-religious because most of the religious skeptics reject the shape of religion, they have in their communities but they do not give up their faith. They are skeptics because they seek to question a specific religious belief and/or practice; or in other cases, they suffer a certain crisis which affect their faith and cause some kind of mistrust. The factors which drive anyone to be a skeptic differ according to several influences, and also the type of skepticism that the person adopts differs from a case to another. However, despite the differences in the factors which form skeptics, and in the type of skepticism they experience, they all share the same attitude of doubt and uncertainty.

#### **An Example of Skepticism in British Gothic:**

##### **1- Skepticism in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the significant figures of the early nineteenth century England. He is a controversial character whose poetic talent is equal to his critical sense and radical thought. Coleridge’s radicalism is realized in criticizing the political and religious norms of his age and his attempts to speak up and correct things which he thinks that they are wrong. His resentment of the religious institutions of his time was obvious; he was not satisfied with the Corruption of the Church of England and with the explanation of some inherited Christian notions which he suspected. His main objection and discontent with the church was due to the way they adopt and explain the notion of “Original sin”. He disagreed with the notion, and his disagreement with the general situation made him retreat and change his religious sect searching for the truth that could satisfy his mind and soul in an attitude that was labeled as “skeptic” since it expressed his doubts and resentment about certain notions of the actual religious tendency at that time. Coleridge’s discontent with the

church is reflected in his poem, *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*. The poem that may appear at first sight as freighting tale based on horror and fantasy, is more complicated because it obtains spiritual and philosophical dimensions. It indicates Coleridge's interest in philosophy and states his religious views within a symbolic journey which can be paralleled to Coleridge's spiritual life in a time when he suffered a faith crisis which led him to sin and which fortunately ended in faith recovery and repentance.

"As Coleridge himself came to realize much later, the shape of this story was to be the shape of his own life. With an uncanny clarity, image, and event after event in the poem became emblems of what Coleridge was later to suffer and discover" (Guide 4).

His attitude towards the notion of "Original Sin" can be analyzed within two frames – religious and philosophical and in each one he presented his unorthodox thoughts and explanation of this concept.

### Religious Discussion of "Original Sin":

#### a- Coleridge's Christian Upbringing and Belief:

Coleridge was born in 1772, into an Anglican<sup>1</sup> family, his father is reverend John Coleridge, the vicar of St Mary's Church and the headmaster of King's school, a free grammar school established by king Henry the eighth. After the father's death, he attended Christ's Hospital Charity school whose lodging and education was provided free to the sons of clergy and there he could obtain a sufficient grounding in Latin, Greek and Literature. He then joined Jesus College, Cambridge in 1791 which had strong links with Christ's hospital. His family expected him to fulfill their expectations and enter The Anglican ministry, but he met there Robert Southey who caused him drop college and encouraged him pursue his poetic and political ambitions.

Cambridge at that time was following the wave of idealism generated in the early days of the French revolution. This had a great impact on Coleridge who was an enthusiastic radical. As most of people at that period of time, Coleridge's religious views were affected by the general political climate of the country, and that was reflected negatively on his attitude and feelings towards his university. As an intellectually rebellious youth, Coleridge was against the university political and religious climate because he was not comfortable with the contradiction of the university policy which claimed liberty and human rights in the distant islands but at the same time prosecuted its students for expressing the same liberal views in England. Things were not better in the religious side where no real freedom was given. One of the incidents which affected Coleridge religious belief was when his tutor at Jesus College, William Frend, was placed on trial in 1793 by the fellows of Jesus College for being a unitarian<sup>2</sup> (a unitarian who also opposes the war against republican France) and no longer supporting Anglicanism.

He was tried in the senate House in May 1793 on the double charges of sedition and defamation of the Church of England. The focus of the trial was the "Rationalist Deism", so as an expected result, Frend was banished from the university, but he remained in touch with Coleridge who was strongly moved by his trial that he thought to reconsider his religious views, especially that at that period of time most of the Radicals and Jacobians who stand against the British government and its established church were dissenters in religion, and most of those who want liberal England were Unitarians. All these factors attracted Coleridge towards Unitarianism and even though he was a son of a church of England vicar, his religious views were moving to a Unitarian church direction.

The trial of William Frend influenced Coleridge and made him change his religious belief and eventually work as a Unitarian

<sup>1</sup> Anglicanism is a western Christian tradition that has developed from the practices, liturgy, and identity of the church of England following the English Reformation. It is one of the largest branches of Christianity, with around 110 million adherents.

<sup>2</sup> Unitarianism is a nontrinitarian branch of Christianity; it believes that Jesus was inspired by God in his moral teachings and that he is a savior but not divine.

preacher after leaving Jesus College. In 1795, Coleridge moved to Bristol where he lectured at Unitarian chapels and wrote over fifty articles for *The Morning Chronicle* that gave him the opportunity to explain the ideas of Joseph Priestly and William Godwin who also affected his thoughts and beliefs. He spent a time in his life as a Unitarian preacher but he finally returned to the church of England in 1814.

It is hard to identify and give one quality for Coleridge's thinking and beliefs. He was influenced by different philosophical and religious schools such as radical politics, German idealism, Unitarianism, Anglican Theology, Neoplatonism<sup>3</sup>, and pantheism<sup>4</sup>. All these different intellectual methods affected his beliefs regarding life, politics, and religion and this resulted in a constant shift in his religious beliefs. He suffered a constant shift from Unitarianism to pantheism to orthodox Christianity till his final return to the church of England, and this signifies his hesitation and dissatisfaction with the actual notions and practices of Christianity at that time and perhaps his hidden desires to correct the religious situation at that time. Coleridge was disappointed with the failure of Christianity to meet his religious needs and he sought to be a reformer and a renovator of Christian religion and teaching at that time. He attempts to make some innovations in theology, and to renovate the Christian religion according to his own beliefs and thoughts and according to the most distinguished theological representation of the period which was theology based on evidence. He was influenced by William Paley<sup>5</sup> who founded religion upon intellectual evidences which depend on mathematical method and demonstration to approach God and know him by evidence. All these ideas affected Coleridge and created a factor or a motivation for him to be a reformer of theology, he thought that it was his duty to follow the steps of Martin Luther whom he regarded as his modal of a reformer

and a theologian. Coleridge found that the church was not a symbol of divinity but also a reminder of human race that they had a duty towards intellectual life. He explained this in his book: *On a Constitution of the Church and State* (1830) where he argues that the churches' function is to enrich the intellectual lives of people.

#### b- "Sin" in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

To begin with, *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* has a sacramental dimension which helps make it analyzed from a religious perspective. The poem is an example of Coleridge's concerns about religious issues, and it reveals his own interpretation of some Christian notions which reflect his unorthodox opinions about the explanation of some religious notions at that time. Coleridge's discussion of his religious concerns in the poem centers around Christian confessions issues such as, *sin* and *redemption*, which he thought that they were mis-explained. The religious explanation given by the church of these notions confused Coleridge and made him doubt their rightness.

The poem is a symbolic representation of a voyage of an old mariner which may represent the life of Coleridge's himself or even the life of anyone of us. Coleridge uses a symbolic language to dramatize the Christian sentiments of: sin, punishment, repentance, and redemption within a religious frame. The religious atmosphere is felt from the very beginning of the poem when the journey is portrayed in a manner similar to the prayer which starts at sunset and is called "vespers" prayer. The same spiritual atmosphere continues through the rest of the poem, and it is enhanced when the albatross appears. The albatross carries a spiritual significance and is treated as a religious symbol. It is presented by a Christian aura when it is hailed in a holy way, and referred to as a Christian soul.

<sup>3</sup> Neo Platonism: A strand of Platonic philosophy that emerged in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD against the background of Hellenistic philosophy and religion.

<sup>4</sup> Pantheism: a doctrine which identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God. It is also a worship that admits or tolerates all gods.

<sup>5</sup> William Paley is an English clergyman, philosopher, and a unitarian well known for his natural theology and exposition of the theological argument for the existence of God in his work *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the deity*.

Coleridge endows it with a religious value to strengthen the spiritual connotation it has especially when he compares it to Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ was sent to save and guide the mankind, the albatross is sent to guide and save the ship. Both the mariner and the crew treat the albatross in the same glorification especially that its appearance adds a cheerful atmosphere to the trip when it guides the crew to the right direction, and this proves that so far, the mariner is a religious person.

Yet, in spite of this blessing appearance and help of the albatross, and without any motive, the mariner commits a horrible crime and kills the same holy albatross. It is by this arbitrary deed, i.e. killing the albatross by the *religious* mariner, that Coleridge begins his discussion of the notion of: "sin" and "redemption" in the poem.

Killing the albatross is a turning point in the poem because it marks a clear distinction between the events before and after its appearance. It is used as a symbol of the philosophy Coleridge adopts in his analysis of religious concepts, and it is full of religious connotations. Coleridge uses it as a symbol of the mysterious nature of "evil" which originates without reason, and which cannot be justified in anyway. Coleridge chooses an innocent character to be killed in a non-justified crime to assert the concept of "Free will". He tends to believe that we sin 'voluntarily' which means we do what we desire and that we have the ability to choose our actions. He did not present any excuse for the mariner nor he justifies his deed attempting to challenge the notion of "inherited sin" which he is totally against. He refuses the idea of heredity of sin, and he asserts that any sin is committed by a free will person who is not responsible of his ancestors' deeds and whose sins and mistakes are not the extension of "Original Sin" as the church says.

On the other hand, attacking this religious symbol has a religious significance. The albatross is regarded as a symbol of spiritual divinity, so offending it is not only offending the animal role in nature, but it is offending the divinity which animals and nature in general represent. It is also compared to Jesus Christ when it was hailed as "Christian soul" and

when the mariner hangs it around his neck, which reminds us of the crucifixion of the Christ.

One may wonder why the crew participated in this crime; the answer is given by Coleridge who wants to say that human beings are evil by nature. The human being always obtains the possibility to be morally good, but he chooses to act evil deliberately especially when he is guided by his self-pride. Sometimes the evil thing happens out of ignorance, but even if the human being is ignorant of the evilness of his deed. It is when the human being believes that he does something he perceives to be virtuous but the truth is that it is not. Both of the crew and the mariner can be considered an example of this kind of evil because both of them look at the albatross from the angle of his usefulness and its role in nature.

If the bird is useful then they agree with idea of protecting it, but if it happens to create a barrier or trouble, then they will not hesitate to kill it. This exactly happens with the crew when the fog clears and the sun rises the second day of the albatross murder. They consider him a bad omen and the reason of the bad weather of the previous days, so getting rid of him is a right decision. They evaluate good actions and bad actions according to their own materialist thinking.

As the case of committing any sin, killing the albatross has its impact and consequences. The crew hangs the dead albatross to his neck in clear sign of his guilt, and they soon fall down dead. The mariner remains alone with his bitter feelings of isolation and regret, but perhaps the most important part of his punishment is losing his sacramental view. After committing his crime, the mariner receives his punishment which includes both physical and mental sides. Physically, when he is deprived of food and water, and mentally when he suffers from alienation and isolation. Both of the crew and the mariner feel thirsty and lose their power of speaking, and they soon fall dead and their souls pass him like the whiz of his cross bow. He suffers for seven days and seven nights without being able to sleep nor to pray. He is trapped in a condition similar to a living-dead, and even after his repentance, he is condemned to wander the land telling his story to everyone.

It is a tale of retribution and since the victim symbolizes the spiritual world, the same spiritual world took revenge for the albatross by damaging not only his ship but also his life because he has to endure an eternal torment as a curse.

### c- Redemption:

Redemption is the act of being pardoned after requesting forgiveness. This is what the bible says when Jesus encouraged his followers to pray to God for forgiveness so that they would be saved. The mariner almost did the same thing, he saw the sea-snakes, recognized their beauty and blessed them by saying:

*“Oh, happy living things  
No tongue their beauty might declare  
Sure, my kind saint took pity on me  
And I blessed them unaware”* (Coleridge 283-286).

The salvation of the mariner begins at the moment when he sees the water snakes and becomes fascinated by their beauty. He appreciates their beauty and while he is “unaware” he blesses them. He is able to pray and at the same time the dead albatross falls off from his neck into the sea. Then, the polar spirit makes the ship move and trope of spirits makes the dead sailors alive again and we get the impression that the mariner repents and obtains god’s forgiveness. The redemption happens when he realizes the value of life and living creatures. He would not realize this unless he reflects, meditates and thinks. It is the reflection which makes him realize God’s existence and power, the thing which Coleridge asks for, and the thing which he describes as the real purpose or meaning for religion. The mariner receives redemption because he earns it and he earns it because he deserves it. It is the change of mentality which causes his redemption.

First, he kills an innocent bird for no reason and he does not even feel sorry because he never appreciates such creatures. However, he later changes his way of thinking and realizes the importance and beauty of sea- creatures because of the nightmare he has. The nightmare which the mariner has, serves as a spiritual experience which shocks the mariner out of his unreflective states. It is the beginning of his journey towards becoming good and towards

morality and faith. The mariner learns to love and appreciate God’s creatures by contemplating. when he is unreflecting, he persecutes his own spirit; but when he reflects, he earns some reward because he blesses and loves sea-snakes.

The truth that is the albatross is not a mere bird, and also the sea-snakes are not only sea creatures. Both of them stand for all living things and both of them obtain a spiritual meaning because they refer to God’s power and existence. The mariner kills the albatross because he wants to control his own fate and to be more powerful than any unnatural force. It is likely that he wants to conquer nature, which is an example of God’s existence and which he never feels its beauty. Killing the albatross is a crime against nature and it implies the mariner’s desire to be free from and to break his connection to any spiritual power.

Both of the mariner and the crew isolate themselves from God because they have already isolated themselves from nature which is the work of God. Coleridge wants to say that knowing God and true religion comes through thinking and reflecting which occurs when the mariner regains his sacramental view of nature which helped him to discover the joy of human communion with God. Now that the curse is gone, and the mariner repents and receives his punishment, he has to go to the Hermit to confess his guilt in a clear sign that he regains his faith and he returns to the righteous path

*“He’ll shrive my soul  
He’ll wash away the albatross blood”* (Coleridge 513-514)

### B: American Supernatural Fiction: Origins of American Gothic (Supernatural) Fiction:

American Gothic is distinguished from the British Gothic in the circumstances that participated in the process of its formation. It is formed by a number of historical, geographical, cultural and political elements that all together formed the background which it comes from.

These elements are:

- a- New England Puritanism
- b- Dark Romanticism
- c- Psychology
- d- Secularization

### a- New England Puritanism:

The Period of the Puritan dominance in the American History is essential in forming the American Gothic. Puritanism is a religious movement which appeared in the sixteenth century in England. Its emergence is traced back to the beginning of the religious reformation in 1517. After Henry the eighth broke with the Catholic church, he established The Church of England which followed Martin Luther's principles. Even after these changes took place, a group of protestants were not satisfied. They believed that the church of England still needed more reform, and it was not reformed in the right intended way. So, Puritanism did not emerge as a distinct religion, but rather as a reform movement within the protestant Church of England. However, their demand for further reformation caused them troubles and forced them to leave England looking for another homeland where they can practice their religion and express their faith in a helpful environment free from any sort of persecution. So, they immigrated to America searching for a place where they can have liberty and where they can practice their religion according to their own standards and demands.

They sailed to the North American colonies in the early seventeenth century having the aim to create a new "pure" community which match their name "puritan" and which reflects the goal which these reformers seek. Their goal was to purify the church and their intended new community. Some of them even believe that they had a pact with God to immigrate to the promised Land and establish a pure holy society there.

The Puritans followed the religious doctrine of the Swiss theologian John Calvin. For them, the Bible is the law and therefore, the form of the government is a theocratic one which created a ground for authoritarianism. This means that ministers are the "authority" and the community leaders. Therefore, questioning the authorities would also mean questioning God.

The Puritans were harsh intolerable people, apart from their constant war against Satan, they held a number of dark strict beliefs. They

believed in the existence of hell and devil, and they demonstrated some extremism looking upon their followers as the only devout and viewing the followers of other sects as sinners. The two controlling principles in their theology centers around two points:

- a- The Original Sin: They believe that since Adam sinned, all people are sinners; they believe in innate and total depravity.
- b- Unconditional Election: God saves those he wishes. Only God knows those who will be saved and those who will be damned to Hell. The person does not know who will be saved. Only few Christians are elected by God; only these will receive his salvation, and the rest are condemned to punishment.

The extremism of Puritanism and its cruel doctrine are best exemplified in the event of Salem Witch Trials, one of the cruelest episodes of the Puritan-New England society in the seventeenth-century. These trials were set to punish and burn witches. They took place from February 1692 to May 1693 in Salem Village which was a poor farming community with approximately five hundred inhabitants. As a result, for these trials, over two hundred people were accused of witchcraft, thirty of whom were found guilty, and twenty were executed without any proof. A large number of these trials was only an abuse of power by the authority figures. No real evidence was found nor required; the mere accusation was enough to convict and destroy the person. The horror of Salem Trials was used in American gothic literature, and it represents one side of the use of Puritanism in American Gothic literature.

The second side which connects Puritanism to American Gothic is the fear of Wilderness. When the puritans immigrated to establish their community, they had to build a new life and a new society within the wilderness of the American continent. They had to face many dangers and this is reflected in the American gothic which Gothicizes woods and wilderness and highlights the role of geography considering nature as a space of evil and sin. New England is described as "Devils Territories," this setting is a key element in

American Gothic, it functions as an allegorical vehicle to criticize the false unfair authority which suffocates the inhabitants and also to shed the light upon the suffering of the marginalized who are treated as scapegoats if they fail to properly fit in the strict puritan society. It also functions as a symbol which represents the puritan fears concerning the weak boundary between their civilized world and savage wilderness. The vast unexplored lands of the new world which surround their settlement created their anxieties and fear about the woods. The puritans associated the woods with the dangers of the native Americans whom the puritans believed to possess a diabolic power. The puritans feared the woods because they represent a space full of superstitions, anxieties, witchcraft, the devil, and violent encounters. One of the most successful writers to reflect the Puritan life and themes in the American Gothic is Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne had a great interest in the colonial past, and in the Puritan era. His novels combine history and a biographical element because he is a descendent of a Puritan family.

One of his famous works is *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) which is set in the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony during the years 1642 to 1649. It tells the story of Hester Prynne, who has a daughter with a man to whom she is not married which is scandalous in the strict Puritan society. The novel discusses her suffering to handle severe punishment as she is first imprisoned and then suffers public punishment, and she is forced to wear a bright red "A" as a sign of her sin "Adultery", and as a warning for other women. Other examples are *Young Goodman Brown* 1835, and *The House of the seven Gables* (1851).

### b- Dark Romanticism:

There is a strong connection between American Gothic literature and Dark Romanticism. Dark Romanticism is an important factor to form the American Renaissance in the period between 1840 -1860. Broadly speaking, it appeared as a reaction to the Enlightenment movement,

Industrial Revolution, and wide spread of rationalization.

American Romanticism has two conflicting sub-genres:

- 1- Optimists represented by Transcendentalism
- 2- Pessimists represented by Dark Romanticism

Dark romanticism is a literary sub-genre which reflects popular fascination with the irrational, demonic, and the grotesque. It is distinguished by an emphasis on human fallibility and their tendency to drift toward sin and self-destruction. Dark romanticism appeared as a response to the transcendental branch in American romanticism. Unlike the Transcendentalists who believe in the goodness of human beings, glorification of nature, imagination and intuition, Dark Romanticism analyzes the man's bad side and sought to show how evil, rather than virtue consumes people. It also questions the natural perfection of man believing that man cannot be perfect. It is fascinated with the melancholia, insanity, crime and the elements of ghosts, and grotesque aspects of imagination.

All the Dark Romanticists believe that humans are naturally subjected to sin and destruction, people cannot ever escape from sin, and people may destroy themselves, their societies, and their religions. Dark Romanticism dominated literature from 1840 to the late 1870s. Some critics believe that the real beginning was by the second half of the eighteenth century with English works as Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), and William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), because they feature outcasts from society, personal torment, and uncertainty about whether the nature of man will bring him salvation or destruction. The name of Dark Romanticism was given to this form by the literary theorist Mario Praz<sup>6</sup> in his lengthy study of the genre published in 1930 "The *Romantic Agony*". The Gothic literature was stemmed from Dark romanticism because it incorporated the same conventions and elements which exist in both kinds of writing. They share the same elements of darkness, the

<sup>6</sup> An Italian critic of art and literature, and scholar of English Literature, his best-known book, *The Romantic Agony*, was a

comprehensive survey of morbid themes that characterized European authors of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

supernatural, they also apply the same features like maniacs, vampires, and images of evil having the forms of devils, ghosts, werewolves, besides themes of supernatural, sin, guilt, evil and madness. Gothic literature shares most of the characteristics with Dark romanticism, but it differs in the point that it is more about sheer terror than dark romanticism's themes of darkness and mystery.

The American writers who adopted this style and ideas are Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. They explored the sinful pessimistic aspects of the human psyche, and they often enhanced their writings by using references from mythology, religion, and classical literature. They also depict the morbid emotions, shared by people as, mourning the lack of faith among people, and the sense of dread derived from the unknown. They published their works shortly before the American civil war and its negative aftermath. It was the time when America was struggling with the social reforms, problem of slavery, and the rights of the minority. At that time and the following years, people began to have a less conventional perspective of religion and have a wise almost a pessimist look of the country.

### c- Psychology:

Sigmund Freud visited the United States in 1909. As he arrived in New York, Freud is reported to have remarked to Carl Jung, his friend and colleague, "They don't realize we're bringing them the plague" (Peeples 29). Indeed, since then, the revolutionary theories of psychology have plagued the American faith (and thinking). Nineteenth century American Gothic is affected by psychology as well. As Michelle Masse claims that "both the Gothic and psycho-analytic explore the ostensibly irrational and distempered passions" (Cameron 1). Psychoanalysis is a very useful approach in analyzing the nineteenth century American Gothic where many Gothic texts present sick, psychopathic character who either act in a hysteric manner or represent dark parts of the soul.

<sup>7</sup> The id is the part of the mind in which innate instinctive impulses and primary processes are manifest.

<sup>8</sup> The ego is the portion of the human personality which is experienced as the "self" or "I"

These texts had a connection to clinical categories of psychoanalysis especially the cases of perversion, neurosis, psychosis, madness, and paranoia. These exist in all Gothic literature. Psychology and Gothic literature have something in common which is Freud's theories in psychoanalysis, especially those centering around the "unconscious" or the "return of the repressed". There are three main figures in psychology:

- a) Sigmund Freud
- b) Jacques Lacan
- c) Carl Jung

Freud, who is the most famous, is credited with the idea of the "unconscious mind" which is one of the most important devices in both Gothic literature and psychology. Since his earliest publications in 1890s, till his death in 1939, he has explored the human psyche and analyzed the human mind and behavior craftly. His *Interpretation of Dreams*, divided the psyche into three main parts:

- a) The Conscious: it represents things which we know
- b) The Pre-conscious: it represents things which we have forgotten.
- c) The Unconscious: it represents things which have been repressed.

This model has been modified and reformed by adding and elaborating some ideas in 1911, when Freud had put two economic forces against one another:

- a. The *Unconscious mind* which includes the pre-conscious which is the source of sexual and sadistic devices.
- b. The *will* which is the internalized parts of social network which held such drives.

Another further modification was given in 1923 when he said that the "*Id*"<sup>7</sup> and "*ego*"<sup>8</sup> map onto the "unconscious" and "conscious mind". He added a third figure which is the "super ego"<sup>9</sup> which allows or forbids actions and which can reassure the ego. All these psychological insights explored by Freud are connected to Gothic literature. Freud and

<sup>9</sup> The super ego is the part of a person's mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reflecting social standards learned from parents and teachers.



Gothic literature depended on each other, there is a mutual interdependence between the two sides. On one hand, Freud credited gothic literary works with the “unconscious”. His theories worked well with gothic and fantasy narratives which seem to use his theories and seem to especially manifest a “return to be repressed”.

On the other hand, Freud drew upon literary texts as the Greek mythology *Oedipus*, Hoffman’s *The Sandman*, Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*, and Charlotte Perkins’ *the Yellow Paper*. He used their themes and plots as a medium to explain and represent his psychological theories, and also as a source of examples to support his theories.

Freud contribution in Gothic narratives is not confined to explore the concept of “The unconscious”, but it goes further to present the psychological phenomenon of “The Uncanny”. Reading Hoffman’s *The Sandman* (1816), Freud defined the “*Uncanny*” as the class of fear which leads back to what is known as the old and long familiar. An uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complex which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs, which have been surmounted, seem once more to be confirmed.

Freud’s essay written about the Uncanny 1919, is important because it enables us to explore motifs of “doubling” “Doppelganger” in gothic texts as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dracula*. It reveals how the Gothic text creates an uncanny mood in which characters became doubled with places and sometimes in personalities. The ambiguity, uncertainty and imagination of the gothic text is a suitable setting for the uncanny. All these literal and psychological elements were translated and portrayed in the fiction of the pioneer of applying psychology in American Gothic the writer, Edgar Allan Poe.

Since the publication of Marie Bonaparte’s study, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psych-Analytic Interpretation* (1933), Poe has acquired a significant value in psychoanalytic criticism. The study analyzes Poe’s tales by Freudian approach which implies two methods: either considering the whole tale as a dream or by resorting to biographical

references and the characters as psychological patients. The study was highly influential in the field of gothic writing and it paved the way to connect Poe’s fiction and American gothic to psychoanalysis theories.

Poe has great achievements in combining psychology to his literary production in American gothic. Since the beginning of his career, he has proved that Gothicism is compatible with psychology. He contributed to exploring the human psyche and connected mental disorders. He wrote different literary forms: dark humor, science fiction, detective stories, gothic fiction. Each story of Poe deals with a problem of human psyche, this proves that psychology and psychiatry are crucial to his literary works. His main fame was due to the fact that he investigated the human mind and that he is a pioneer of psychology since he presented in his fiction, the connection between one’s behavior and psychology.

Poe anticipated modern psychological theories in his stories which centers on the effect of a guilty conscience, madness or psychological states. His plots usually have the elements of informing dream, disintegrated bodies, and disintegrated psyches. He also had an emphasis on hidden motives, altered states of consciousness, sadism, self-destructive tendencies, masochism, neurosis, and death wish. Poe also uses the gothic settings and characters to transform his imagination into important symbols to support his psychoanalysis in his fiction. “Nearly all of Poe’s protagonists evince paranoias, and some also power mania” (Del Guercio 102).

In his early career, some critics accused him of imitating German gothic, but Poe emphasized in the preface to his collection of fiction, *Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque* (1839): “If in many of production terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not Germany, but of the soul, that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate results” (Hayes 84).

He also had a knowledge of *Phrenology* which is a nineteenth-century equivalent of psychoanalysis. Phrenology (once called crainoscopy and craniology) is a psychological theory founded by German anatomist and physician Franz Joseph Gall. Gall proposes that the faculties of the mind and character traits are

manifested through special organs in separate portions of the brain. For instance, the part of the brain responsible for parental love was thought to be located at the very back of the head, while another character trait, conscientiousness was associated with the part of grey matter near the top of the head above the ear.

Thus, the shape of one's head could tell the phrenologist about one's character. Another important figure in same field is George Combe who founded a phrenological journal in Edinburgh in 1832. He gave a series of successful lectures on phrenology which Poe learnt from. He was already aware of this field in science from *The Southern Literary Magazine* where he worked in the period from 1835 to 1837.

Poe was attracted to the theory and applied it in some of his stories *The Business Man* 1840, *Some Words with the Mummy* 1845, *The Murder in The Rue Morgue* 1884, *The Black Cat* 183

Madness is a main theme in most of his stories where he tends to portray it as an inherent human characteristic that manifests itself in a certain moment and due to some factors. Madness is presented in numerous stories where the lack of mental clarity leads to wrong actions. For Example, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), *William Wilson* (1839), *The Tell Tale Heart* (1843), and *The Black Cat* (1843).

The *Tell-Tale Heart* narrates the story of the man who murders the old man whom he shares an apartment with. The protagonist hides the corpse in the room. When the police arrive to interrogate the protagonist, for the neighbors' heard screams during the night, he lets the policemen sit exactly on the corpse which is hidden. The protagonist manages to mislead the officers but he starts to hear a heartbeat sound. The sound grows louder, the narrator confesses of the murder and shows the disfigured corpse. Another example is in *The Fall of the House of Usher* where madness is used as the general motif in the plot of the story. For some time, the narrator works with Usher to alleviate his illness, they paint, compose, and write together the activities by which Poe reveals Usher's

inner mind. The mess in his paintings and poetry are metaphors for his depraved mind.

Madness is also presented in another technique which involves the description of the concept of the Uncanny /doppelganger which usually requires combining the elements of sin, guilt, and madness. Doppelgangers whom Poe introduced in his fiction are those characters who balance the relationship between sin and virtue. One of the interpretations of doppelganger is that the doppelganger, the double (the second version of the character) usually appears at the moments when the protagonists commit an evil deed. If the character commits a crime, he needs guidance in order not to be fully lost in the world of sin. This guidance is provided by a doppelganger. In *The Fall of The House of Usher* (1839), Medline is a doppelganger of Roderick who in a fit of madness, murders his sister and bury her alive. Yet, she returns to remind her brother of what he has done to her (Del Geurcio 112).

#### **d- Secularism / Skepticism:**

Nineteenth century American Gothic was influenced by the general social and literary climate of the period. The period witnessed some cultural, social and political shifts in the American society. These shifts made the second half of the nineteenth century called "The Age of Secularism". This fact was reflected in the literature produced in the period including the Gothic Fiction. The term "Secularism" was coined by George Jacob Holyake in 1851 to designate a new movement whose followers espoused a specific position in relation to *religion* which is distinct from the thought of atheism. Secularism does not mean no religion, as its first connotation may imply, it still recognizes religion but it does not manifest it in all aspects of life. Secularism in American gothic is not confined to religion, it is explained in terms of a logical consequence of the rise of Enlightenment ideology which privileged science, the second branch of secularism. There was a decrease in the power and influence of religious institutions and beliefs in favor of science, and this created a wave of skepticism about irrational metaphysical issues.

This skepticism is enhanced by the advent of *Modernism* highlights the manifestation of a larger cultural process that affects the modern societies which is Rationalization which can be summarized in the rise of the scientific world view. The third branch of Secularism means the formation of the “Modern state “where new values like capitalism, nationalism, and other ideologies prevailed. The Modern state was formed by applying certain values and orientations such as the emergence of industrialization, the capitalist economy, the rational calculation of profit and loss, the establishment of a rational system of laws and administration in modern society, and the demand for the expected freedom and equality after the movement of abolitionism.

Examples of Secularism in American Gothic are Hawthorne’s *Custom House* of *The Scarlet Letter* preface where he presented an authentic basis of the Puritan society. He explained that he really discovered the parchment sheet that contained the historical manuscript on which the novel is based. The preface sets the atmosphere of the story where he connects the present to the past. He described how the strict instructions of Puritans based on religion were eventually smashed by the commercialism and financial interests of the 1700s.

Another example is given by Harriet E. Welson, in her novel *Our Nig* (1859). An autobiographical novel which tells the fictionalized version of Wilson’s life story through the character of “Frado” who is known as “Nig” by other white people. Frado is born to a white woman and a black man. After the death of the father, the mother decides to leave her in the care of a white wealthy family where she endures racial, and violent abuse. The novel explains how Frado suffers to find a place in a society which underestimates mix-raced people like her. It also tackles the theme of the demand for a modern state law to protect this category in the society and guarantee them freedom and civil rights. Secularism is also found in *The Fall of the House of Usher* where we find the rational attitude which is skeptical of the metaphysical and the unseen and which insists in applying the scientific outlook in analyzing any incident.

## An Example of Skepticism in American Supernatural Fiction:

### a- Skepticism in *The Fall of The House of Usher*: Conflict between science and Metaphysical world:

Poe’s fiction was influenced by two philosophical trends which dominated the cultural situation at that time. His fiction appeared within a culture dominated by “reason” as a consequence of applying the philosophical school of “common sense” which prevailed at that time. The “Common sense” philosophy originally started in Scotland and immigrated to America where it proved very popular. It is a realist school of philosophy that came in the aftermath of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought. Its famous figures include Thomas Reid, Adam Ferguson, and James Beattie. The philosophy says that we live in a material world which is only understood by our senses, and that any judgement should be based on “experience”.

This philosophy which represents one cultural trend at that time was contradicted by another philosophical trend which says that ‘Reason’ is a transcendental issue and it can only be gained and felt by intuition and introspection. This conclusion mirrors Kant’s and Hume’s ideas and represents the opposite trend which challenged the first direction. Poe believes that the rational mind is too limited to attain metaphysical knowledge as we find in the story.

*The Fall of the House of Usher* combines the two elements where we investigate an irrational experience within a rational framework, and we find a clash between the two. The story presents two opposing methods and views. The irrational, mystic represented by “Roderick”, and the rational, scientific represented by “the narrator”. We understand since the beginning of the story that the narrator is invited to the house of Rodrick Usher in a certain mission. His childhood friend, Rodrick Usher, suffers from a fatal illness and he needs his friend’s help. The narrator accepts the invitation and goes to support Rodrick in his predicament, and here the real story begins.

The moment the narrator approaches the house of Usher represents the beginning of a conflict which will clash two different methods and will widen to affect the narrator himself and shake his scientific outlook in his life. When the narrator approaches the house, he feels unexplained melancholic feelings to overwhelm him.

“With the first glimpses of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit”

The house is surrounded by some mysterious vapor which creates some “iciness” and “sickness” in the heart of the narrator’s heart. The sickness in the narrator’s heart augments when he meets his sick friend who is in a terrible condition. “The ghastly power of skin”, “The miraculous luster of the eye”, “The silken hair”, all this frightens the narrator, but the fear is emphasized when Roderick ascribes his weird sickness to the house itself.

Roderick who explains that his twin sister is the only living relative in their family, suffers from a mysterious sickness which affects his senses. His eyes cannot handle strong light, certain smells are intolerant, and his skin is allergic to most kinds of fabrics besides that his ears are badly affected by noises. His sister Madeline is not in a better situation for she suffers cataleptic seizures and she almost loses interest in life. Roderick claims that this terrible condition is due to the “atmosphere “which is produced by the house objects and surroundings. He goes far in saying that the house and its surroundings are “sentient”. The way the stones are arranged, the spreading fungi, the decayed trees around, the tarn, besides the man-made things which furnish the house all generate a mystic energy and a mesmerizing atmosphere which gives the house certain vivacity and life, and that this has its own impact on the house’s residents.

The narrator who is a son of a western culture of rationality, receives all what Roderick says with severe skepticism. He rejects Roderick’s theory of the sentient house and mystic atmosphere describing it as “fancy”. As a rational person who depends on logic, he refuses to believe that the house is “alive” and interprets this conclusion as a consequence of Roderick’s depressed mind, so he chooses to be more practical and try to alleviate the

melancholy which tortures Rodrick’s mind. Unfortunately, all his attempts are futile, they fail to confront the morbid atmosphere of the house which is intensified by Rodrick’s gloomy choice of reading, music and painting.

Rodrick’s rhapsodies ‘The Haunted House’ with its under current meaning, the frightening paintings, the choice of the books, all seem to generate mystic currents which flow everywhere spreading an unpleasant negative effect. Things become worse after Madeline’s death and her burial in the house. At this point, things start to take a serious more frightening curve when the narrator starts to feel a strong feeling of negativity and unease which can be explained as a presence of that “atmosphere.” He himself suffers from a gloomy feeling which attacks his body and soul. He feels that he is infected with the bleakness of the house which now appears to be really haunted. However, again due to his rationality he helplessly resorts to science in a final attempt to analyze the house’s condition. He tries to scrutinize the landscape because he thinks that the atmosphere stems from it. He is trying to identify the cause of “utter depression of the soul” which for inexplicable reason has come over him, but still, he does not find the cause of his unexpected misery.

‘I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me... but my efforts were fruitless. An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame, and at length, there sat upon my every heart an *incubus* of utterly causeless alarm”

The narrator is puzzled and confused, he is lost in his doubts and uncertainty. There is something “unseen” and mysterious which controls and affects him. He compares it to an “incubus” a demon which possesses him. He, the rational man, whose scientific outlook forces him to label any supernatural phenomenon as “superstition” and to refer to Roderick’s theory of a sentient house as one of his “fantastic superstitions”, uses the same language of the pre-modern superstitious world. He is using the language of spirits and demons to explain his condition.

The narrator’s rationality is shaken, he tries to apply a scientific method to justify the mysterious situation he finds himself in. He

does have a scientific explanation for the weird atmosphere of the house which he ascribes to an electrical phenomenon caused by a rank miasma of the tarn around the house. However, he confesses that he is infected by Roderick's condition and he is possessed by an alien force which cannot be measured nor explained by science.

At the beginning he appears to be confident armed by his rationality and skepticism to the unseen world and supernatural matters, but later his skepticism fades away and he becomes helpless and defenseless in front of an attack conducted by metaphysical inexplicable alien force. By the end of the story, and in a stormy night, the narrator reads for Roderick the "Mad Artist" trying to distract him from the uncalm weather. For his big surprise, he hears some noises which dreadfully mirrors the actions in the plot. He realizes that these sounds are made by his sister Madeline who turns to be alive! The young woman appears; she comes to her brother and they both fell dead. The narrator immediately leaves the house which crumbles and falls in the tarn taking all its secrets with it. The story craftly presents two opposing methods of thinking:

- a. Mystic, Romantic, imaginative method represented by Roderick.
- b. Rational, scientific, skeptic presented by the narrator.

Both of these characters are involved in analyzing a paranormal phenomenon of a "Haunted House". Each one gave his own explanation which reflects a cultural trend at that time. Roderick is convinced that the house is alive; it almost breathes and it affects whoever reside in the house. On the other hand, the skeptic narrator who is not convinced and tries to rationalize the issue giving a scientific explanation which ascribes the morbid mesmerizing atmosphere of the house to a physical electrical phenomenon caused by a rank miasma of the tarn around the house. However, although the narrator does not believe Roderick's theory, he is impressed by it and he cannot resist it either. Towards the end of the story, he admits that he is infected by Roderick's condition and he declares himself "possessed". It seems that science is not

always capable of explaining certain issues. Poe gives the readers an important message which asserts the limitation of the human mind regarding understanding metaphysical, supernatural matters in this life which they absolutely exist.

### Conclusion:

- 1- Supernatural fiction is of a heterogenous nature which results from combining various cultural, political and scientific element.
- 2- Skepticism is a crucial element in forming supernatural fiction of both British and American Supernatural fiction.
- 3- The existence of Skepticism in Supernatural fiction mainly takes a religious or a scientific form.

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