



Beyond Entombed Desires of the Gothic Grave: Queer Temporality in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

Tina Bharati

M.A Student

Amity Institute of English Studies and Research

Amity University, Noida, India

Abstract: This study has been undertaken to investigate the Gothic novels of Anne Rice and Daphne du Maurier work as a conceptual framework for analyzing queer temporalities. It expands upon this take with various queer theories from notable academics. Overall it interrogates how these works dismantle the heteronormative constructs of time and space, love and desire, as well as community and kinship. Themes of eroticism, entrapment, skepticism, spectrality, and the supernatural are used to structure and shape the Gothic grave (death) as a metaphor for repressed identities and such uncanny temporalities. This study brushes upon the genre's potential to critique normative frameworks of gender, sexuality, and historical progression, and ask the question, "Can we go beyond the norms?"

Index Terms - Queer Temporality, Gothic, Grave, Heteronormativity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature has always been the subject of critical scrutiny, misapprehension, and condemnation from its inception in the mid-eighteenth century. The Gothic indeed provides an unlikely space for the exploration and at times even appreciation of subversive desires and identities. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a leading scholar known for her groundbreaking work in queer studies, initially focused on Gothic literature, conceptualizes queerness in her work *Tendencies* as an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" (1993). Her approach rejects the notion of a singular, monolithic significance of gender and sexuality. Serving queerness as a flexible placeholder for non-normative identities. It acts as a form of defiance to be neatly defined or confined, which can prove unsettling for many who are expecting more palatable cases of representation.

Queer lives are often characterized by a lack of adherence to these normative temporal frameworks, starting from childhood. This paper takes Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, and breaks down how the immortal vampires embody a temporality outside familiar societal conventions. It seeks to unravel how these

'Queer Temporalities' are depicted as to dismantle traditional narratives of life and progress. In similar fashion, it analyzes how Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* uses memory and haunting to expose repressed desires and destabilize the heteronormative framework of marriage. Which stretches out to be another branch linking queer temporality with the Gothic. Positing the Gothic grave or death as a baseline where heteronormative temporalities and identities are subverted. After all compelling aspect of Gothic fiction lies in its ability to depict the normalized, everyday experiences of trauma, like the anecdotes that follow after an individual's death; the grief and the grave, rather than solely focusing on its dramatic, jarring moments like the massacre or murder. In doing so, it affirms the Gothic's relevance as a genre that continues to challenge and re-imagine the boundaries of morality and mortality.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To provide an extensive analysis on how the selected works utilise Gothic tropes to explore queer temporality and disrupt the linear narratives of desire, death and identity. It also examines the subversion of heteronormative structures within them, underscoring their significance with various studies of 'The Queer Theory'.

III. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study will be adapting the 'Qualitative Research Method' while closely examining non-numerical data such as research journals, articles, and other written materials (both digital and in-print) to gain insights into the representation of 'Queer Temporality' in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Rebecca*. This study engages with the theoretical perspectives of various scholars, whose works on queer theory and feminist criticism provide a foundation for analyzing the Gothic as a space of repressed desires and subversive identities.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Narratives featuring supernatural or unsettling elements have been a longstanding tradition in human artistic expression. Driven by curiosity about the mysteries of nature, human behavior, and unexplained phenomena, people have explored the occult and the aberrant, sharing their findings on the unknown throughout history. When literary styles rejected the refined, artificial ideals of the 'Age of Reason', the backlash against conformity and predictability led literature to delve into the obscure past, retrieving established folktales about intriguing mysteries. The most accessible model of imaginative storytelling originated in the Middle Ages, a prolific period characterized by stark contrasts — great productivity and heinous crimes, piety and religious cruelty, admirable martial valor and the dealings of witches, scientific

innovation and alchemical experimentation, royal ceremony and the ‘Danse macabre’, and grand architecture serving both religious and civic purposes. This era thrived on extensive cultural exchange, as wandering Jewish scholars visited distant Jewish communities, merchants imported wonders from Asia, and Christian crusaders traversed the lengthy route to Jerusalem. The writings generated during this time range from hagiographies and Marian hymns to fables of Reynard the Fox, Chinese ghost stories, troubadour love poems, and tales of shape-shifting. Like the intricate threads of a fine tapestry, the strands of medievalism remained sturdy, lending their hues and decorative flourishes to the late 18th century, when traditional Gothic literature formally emerged. While some Gothic works received favorable reviews in periodicals, contemporary critics also voiced concerns about their potentially unethical content. This is quite ironic, as scholar Elizabeth Napier has observed “that many early Gothic romances were essentially moral tales cloaked in supernatural elements” (720). This tendency is particularly evident in the case of Minerva Press publications that emulated the style of Ann Radcliffe.

The narrative arc of Sedgwick’s analysis in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* often relies on unsettling or supernatural elements, exploring the clashes and resolutions between characters’ self-recognition. The conclusion, whether triumphant or exhausting, nevertheless reaffirms a certain structured, carceral sublime in the representation of the body, politics, and history. These narrative forms echo the hysteria and paranoia of Gothic tropes, whose occasional elegance can be appreciated while also acknowledging their historical and gender-specific biases. It reflects on how the representational aspirations of Gothic literature and this meditation on it were shaped by a particular understanding of embodiment and the struggle between text and image, with implications for the very possibility of fictional identity. This ties to the early deconstructive stance regarding the boundaries and meaning of the “self” has resulted in a heightened and legitimized emphasis on the Gothic-inherited values of symmetry, privacy, and heteronormativity inherent in the embodied subjects it evokes (Sigmund and Strachey 1969). The Gothic narrative's preoccupation with a nostalgic past reflects a reaction to the rise of the middle class, envisioning the medieval period as an idealized social model of unified and orderly “organic wholeness” in contrast to the emerging individualized bourgeois society. In the Gothic imagination, the “medieval individual was defined by their relation to other groups and the external world,” while “modern identity is defined in terms of autonomy and independence” (Winterman and Kelly 2010) — a frightening prospect compared to the comforting, if fantastical, past founded on order and unity.

The use of Gothic aesthetics to generate fantasy norms to which society must return aligns with Jack Halberstam's definition of the Gothic as a "technology of subjectivity" that produces "deviant subjectivities" against which the "normal, the healthy, and the pure" can be defined. Throughout the twentieth century, anti-Gothic biases persisted, rooted in aesthetic and technical grounds. These biases intensified following the concerted effort in the 1930s and 1940s to establish a 'Great Tradition' in English literature. This development served to consolidate problematic, constraining principles of evaluation, literary criticism, historical categorization, and notions of periodization. Notably, the few critics who closely examined the Gothic in the early 20th century did so without apology or justification. Works such as Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* and Eino Railo's *The Haunted Castle* positioned the Gothic, or 'terror-romanticism,' as a valid, rich, and multifaceted literary form (Railo p. 76). While these critical works had their own agendas, strengths, and weaknesses, their core aim of subjecting the Gothic to rigorous scholarly scrutiny marked a novel approach.

Queer theory, as Annamarie Jagose explains, examines the instabilities in the purportedly stable connections between biological sex, gender identity, and sexual desire. It encompasses a range of diverse sexualities and, owing to its non-specificity, has the potential to be applied in various contexts. The novels discussed here reflect this multifaceted focus. Some, such as David Leavitt's *While England Sleeps* (1998) and Ellen Galford's *The Dyke and the Dybbuk* (1993), operate primarily within the identity categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Others, however, influenced by the Foucauldian view of such categories as regulatory and oppressive, as well as the post-structuralist emphasis on the fluidity of desire, seek to destabilize the notion of a fixed sexual identity or gender. Accepting the perspective of identity as contingent and the product of fantasy, these novels interrogate and deconstruct the binary division of homosexual/heterosexual. The term 'queer' itself is ambiguous in meaning. Within academic contexts, it is employed in relation to queer theory to challenge the notion of a fixed sexual identity and destabilize the binary distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality. However, the term is also used as a shorthand to collectively refer to the identities of lesbian, gay, and occasionally, transgender individuals. From its origins with Horace Walpole's pioneering *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to its later manifestations in nineteenth-century classics like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coalesced around a preoccupation with themes including paranoia, doubling, terror, incarceration, live entombment, sexualized power relations and torture, monstrosity, ghostly presences and hauntings, the grotesque, and the uncanny.

The relationship between queer theory and Gothic studies has been mutually beneficial. Since the emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s, scholars have explored how queer reading strategies can illuminate Gothic fiction. This interdisciplinary approach has generated valuable new insights into the Gothic genre. Prominent works such as Sue Ellen Case's 1991 essay 'Tracking the Vampire' and George Haggerty's book *Queer Gothic* exemplify this fruitful intersection. However, it would be reductive to consider the queer theorization of the Gothic solely in terms of what queer theory has contributed to Gothic studies. As scholars Michael O'Rourke and David Collings have observed, the Gothic is not merely a subject for queer analysis; queer theory itself can be seen as inherently Gothic in nature. To a significant extent, Gothic literature and the perceived "the End of the Enlightenment" appear to be closely intertwined. The authors of early Gothic novels, in their depictions of heightened imaginations, the supernatural, unrestrained passion, and the irrational more broadly, can be credited with ushering in the Romantic era just as much as Wordsworth and Coleridge through their *Lyrical Ballads*. However, it is noteworthy that many Gothic novels introduce events that defy reason primarily to reaffirm the value of rational thought. When we step back into history and the literature surrounding it, we come face to face with the answer as to why the changing face of the 'Beyond Entombed Desires...' question in the Gothic has been only tangentially examined.

V. INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

One of the common features of the Gothic genre is the distinctive quality of the fear it evokes. This fear is characterized by an anticipation of a somewhat ambiguous yet palpable evil. It is a fear of obscured dangers lurking in the night. Overt explicitness undermines its effectiveness, as Gothic fear arises not from what is directly visible but from what is sensed beyond the scope of sight. For example, the unsettling creations of J.R.R. Tolkien's imagination in *The Lord of the Rings*, such as the Nazgûl and Gollum, are exemplary illustrations of the power of the impressionistic over the concrete. After all, Gothic literature has always responded to the conventions and associated depictions found in traditional writings from the late 1700s and early 1800s. In doing so, the Gothic genre explored controversial themes such as incest, murder, and promiscuity, this provided for a stimulating context for the supernatural and occult to emerge. In essence, Gothic writing rebelled against established domestic and sentimental literary trends, embodying and cultivating a pervasive sense of horror and terror (Arnaud 123).

In *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice, the spirit of Gothic disruption is echoed through the complex relationships between conservative politics, popular culture, and transgressive themes. While not a comprehensive account of the cultural experience in the United States over the past two decades, the novels offer insights into our deeply held societal assumptions and the banality of transgressive elements in late 20th-century literature. Rice's five-volume series demonstrates the topical urgency of popular fiction, as well as the distinctive aura of decadence that characterizes the author's work. A key aspect of Rice's captivation of her readers is the prominence of homoerotic desire. The opening of *Interview with the Vampire* is set in San Francisco's gay district, and the scene between the vampire Louis and the gay "boy" who interviews him, after their initial meeting in a "bar," functions as a straightforward parody of queer seduction. This is not accidental, as Rice demonstrates a clear interest in male-male desire and utilizes imagery from gay culture to imbue her characters with substance and texture. Furthermore, the author portrays Lestat as the prototypical gay predator in her cultural milieu, roaming the darkness with an insatiable appetite often satisfied by the blood of troubled yet alluring male victims. Rice herself has expressed a personal attraction to this highly transgressive protagonist, the superhuman blond figure who moves with the grace of a dancer and takes.

The Gothic novel often features protagonists who embody a blend of heroic and villainous qualities, creating a moral ambiguity that elevates the literary complexity of the work. As Robert Hume observes, this moral ambiguity arises from the coexistence of malevolent and admirable traits within the protagonist, leading to a reader's conflicted moral evaluation. While the reader may reject the evil embodied by the villain, they are simultaneously fascinated by the protagonist's heroic greatness, as exemplified in the strength of will and defiance of Lestat. This moral ambiguity imbues the Gothic novel with a greater depth and nuance, distinguishing it from the shallow sensationalism that characterizes lesser works. It is not essential for moral ambiguity to be present for a novel to be considered Gothic, as demonstrated by the unambiguous monstrosity of *Dracula* or the obvious corruption of *Ambrosio*. However, this moral ambiguity appears to be a crucial factor in elevating certain Gothic novels, such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *Rebecca*, to the realm of serious literary consideration.

Transformations in Gothic literature reveal the fluid and unstable nature of identity. The male characters often deliberately present themselves as different from who they truly are, concealing their corrupt and guilty natures behind elaborate facades or while fleeing from their misdeeds. Figures like *Ambrosio* and

Schedoni exemplify this deception, while Frankenstein appears as a respectable intellectual but actually engages in monstrous acts. In contrast, the female protagonists are depicted as embodiments of integrity, though they are frequently confined and threatened. Interestingly, these heroines, such as Emily, are not passively submissive, but actively confront the dangers they face, reflecting a complex engagement with sexual politics. Overall, the Gothic mode explores the malleability of identity and the tension between outward appearance and inner truth. One can in fact analyse how the protagonist Louis in *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* undergoes a queer transformation, transitioning from a heteronormative male identity to a more fluid sexual subjectivity during and after his transition from human to vampire within the dark Gothic world. This queer transformation, beginning with the act of becoming a vampire, can be analyzed in two phases: 'a phase of resistance' and 'a phase of acceptance'. These two phases are observed in three key narrative situations: Louis' relationship with his maker Lestat, the antagonist; the triangular dynamic between Louis, Lestat, and Claudia; and Louis' relationship with Armand following Lestat's death. By closely analyzing specific scenes throughout the book's narration and drawing on theories from queer studies, Gothic literature, and psychoanalysis, the path of Louis' queer temporality is built.

Terry Castle claimed in *The Apparitional Lesbian* that "When it comes to lesbians ... many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them". Now if his statement is valid and substantiated, then the inability to acknowledge the existence of lesbians represents not only a concerning commentary on their status within American society, but also a significant challenge in their representation. The pervasive theme of one woman's haunting by another, whether in a literal or figurative sense, is a central focus within the Female Gothic tradition. This motif is integral to works as diverse in time period and narrative style as Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*. Scholars have analyzed the spectral female figure in divergent ways, often ascribing her various functions such as that of the heroine's mother, alter ego, competitor, or intimate partner. In Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*, the narrator reflects that "We can never go back again, that much is certain. The past is still too close to us. The things we have tried to forget and put behind us would stir again, and that sense of fear, of furtive unrest, struggling at length to blind unreasoning panic – now mercifully stilled, thank God – might in some manner unforeseen become a living companion, as it had been before.". This excerpt encapsulates the notion that queer identities and experiences are often tied to a sense of Gothic disruption, where the past and repressed elements of one's identity resurface unexpectedly.

The Female Gothic tradition can be characterized by a recursive, intertextual relationship, where texts continually reference and reinterpret their literary predecessors. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* and the "modern Gothic" or "drugstore Gothic" novels popularized by authors like Victoria Holt in the 1960s (Bryden 514). Just as *Rebecca* has been analyzed as a Gothic reworking of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the modern Gothic has been described as a hybrid form combining elements of both the Brontë and du Maurier novels. The formulaic nature of the modern Gothic genre, marked by lurid cover art featuring a young, frightened woman against the backdrop of an imposing house or castle, reflects a deliberate marketing strategy that emphasized the intertextual connections to these earlier works of Gothic fiction (Russ 666). For a genre defined by its exploration of disruptions—to identity, power structures, and the very foundations of society, Maurier's *Rebecca*, along with its spectral literary predecessors, illustrates how themes of queerness and class anxieties intertwine, unsettling the assumed stability of heritage and hierarchy. The fates of characters like Mrs. Clemm and Mrs. Danvers, who are devoted to those outside the traditional center of power, highlight an undercurrent of subversion within these Gothic narratives. Similarly, the revelation of Rebecca's body and the transformation of Manderley into a public park serve as potent metaphors for the collapse of rigid social structures, reinforcing the Gothic's preoccupation with displacement and loss. Ultimately, the lingering sense of alienation experienced by the second Mrs. de Winter encapsulates the unresolved tensions at the heart of Gothic storytelling—where the past refuses to be fully buried, and queerness remains both a disruptive force and a space of possibility.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Gothic is the cradle of the spectral other, the open closet for the temporal queer and a home to the eternally alien. The works of Rice and du Maurier have indeed expanded upon this notion meticulously. We see queerness in the Gothic just how we see the Gothic embedded within the queer. Nothing is strange yet everything is uncanny. And the loop continues, just how time cannot be boxed in a linear pattern, this state of queer temporality is highlighted best in the phantom echoes of the Gothic graves.

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