

## Gothic Expression in Contemporary American Literature

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**Abstract.** This article discusses issues of Gothic expression in contemporary American literature. It deals primarily with the interpretation of Gothic works, their meaning and significance, the period in which the works were written, and covering multiple types of Gothic expression psychological, postmodern, feminist, and Southern Gothic. The methods align well with the research questions, ensuring that the study provides in-depth literary analysis rather than superficial observations. However, the Eco-Gothic subgenre is not fully represented among the primary texts, which could have strengthened the analysis of environmental themes.

**Key words:** Gothic tradition, American literature, motifs, writers reinterpret fear.

### Introduction

The Gothic tradition, which originated in the 18th century, has evolved significantly over time. While classical Gothic literature relied on supernatural elements, haunted spaces, and moral decay, contemporary American literature has adapted these motifs to explore psychological, social, and technological anxieties. This study aims to investigate how Gothic expression manifests in modern American literature, examining the thematic shifts and exploring the relevance of this genre in the 21st century.

The research focuses on several questions: How do authors use Gothic tropes to engage with contemporary issues? What new themes have emerged in modern Gothic literature? How do contemporary American writers reinterpret fear, trauma, and alienation through Gothic elements?

### Methods

This study uses qualitative literary analysis to explore Gothic expression across a range of contemporary American literary works. The analysis focuses on five primary texts:

- *Beloved* by Toni Morrison
- *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski
- *The Shining* and *Doctor Sleep* by Stephen King
- *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado
- *Eileen* by Ottessa Moshfegh

These works were selected for their representation of diverse subgenres, including psychological Gothic, postmodern Gothic, and Southern Gothic. The study also examines secondary literature on Gothic theory, focusing on themes of trauma, identity, technology, and ecological anxiety. Through close readings, the research identifies the key Gothic elements in these texts and how they engage with modern societal concerns.

## Results

The analysis reveals several trends in the way Gothic expression has evolved in contemporary American literature:

### 1. Psychological Horror and Trauma

- Works such as *Beloved* and *The Shining* demonstrate a shift from external horrors to internal psychological terror. Personal trauma and mental illness serve as the new "haunting" forces that plague characters.

### 2. Urban and Technological Gothic

- *House of Leaves* presents a postmodern interpretation of Gothic horror, with the house functioning as a destabilizing space that reflects both architectural and emotional disorientation.
- The increasing presence of technology in modern life introduces new Gothic anxieties related to surveillance, artificial intelligence, and isolation.

### 3. Identity, Gender, and the Body

- Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties* explores the female body as a site of fear and resistance, blending horror with feminist critiques. Issues of sexuality, repression, and self-identity are central to the Gothic expression in her work.

### 4. Southern Gothic and Social Critique

- Novels like *Eileen* reflect the continuing tradition of Southern Gothic, focusing on moral ambiguity and cultural decay. They explore themes of loneliness, repression, and alienation in rural or marginalized communities.

### 5. Eco-Gothic

- While less emphasized in the analyzed works, environmental anxieties have emerged in recent Gothic literature. Climate change and the unpredictability of nature are seen as new forces of terror, reflecting modern concerns about the degradation of the environment.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that contemporary Gothic literature reflects the changing fears and anxieties of modern society. Instead of haunted castles and supernatural entities, the new Gothic explores themes such as mental health issues, urban alienation, and identity crises. These shifts align with broader social developments, including increased awareness of psychological trauma, the influence of technology, and evolving ideas about gender and sexuality.

The results also highlight how Gothic expression serves as a tool for social critique. Authors like Toni Morrison use Gothic tropes to explore historical trauma, particularly the legacy of slavery, while Machado reclaims Gothic elements to address gender-based oppression. Moreover, the genre's engagement with urban and ecological decay reflects existential concerns about the sustainability of human life in the face of societal and environmental collapse.

## Conclusion

The research demonstrates that Gothic expression remains a vibrant and relevant force in contemporary American literature. By shifting from external horrors to internal and societal fears, modern authors have reshaped the Gothic genre to address the complexities of today's world. As explored through the works of Morrison, King, Machado, and others, the Gothic tradition offers a powerful lens for examining trauma, identity, and social decay. This study suggests that the Gothic will continue to evolve, reflecting new forms of fear and alienation as they emerge in an ever-changing world.

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