

## 2.2 The Gothic

*The desire to be terrified is as much part of human nature as the need to laugh.*<sup>181</sup>

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, although my analysis deals separately with the grotesque and the Gothic, they should be conceived as complementary. Actually, they are tightly interwoven and taking into consideration some critical essays and studies about the Gothic has given me full evidence of the common features shared by the grotesque and the Gothic.

First of all, it is relevant to observe that also the Gothic can be considered a difficult, much debated topic. Its complexity is partly due to the fact the Gothic is often analysed on the basis of stereotypes. In fact, Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy open their introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Gothic Literature* with the following statement:

What is Gothic? There is no single, straightforward answer to this question. For many years, it was taken for granted that the Gothic novel flourished from the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 to Charles Maturin's *Melmoth, The Wanderer* in 1820.<sup>182</sup>

Like the grotesque, the Gothic articulates a range of complex meanings. Indeed, as remarked by David Punter, the term Gothic has "a wide variety of meanings",<sup>183</sup> and it is impossible not to see that these are exactly the same words used by Barasch in his *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*.<sup>184</sup> In *The Gothic Tradition*, David Stevens emphasises the importance of this notion by saying that "there are so many gothic associations that the

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<sup>181</sup> Hennessy, Brendan, *The Gothic Novel*, Harlow, Longman, 1978, p. 7.

<sup>182</sup> Spooner, Catherine, McEvoy, Emma, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Gothic Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: Being a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, London, Longman, 1980, p. 1.

<sup>184</sup> Cfr. p. 30.

whole concept may seem at times indefinable and elusive",<sup>185</sup> and that the term Gothic is "applied vaguely and without differentiation to virtually every form of human activity".<sup>186</sup> Such a width of meanings could imply the risk of losing something of the Gothic cutting edge,<sup>187</sup> or, to use Kayser's words, "a loss of substance".<sup>188</sup> It has certainly led critics and commentators to give contrasting opinions on the nature of the Gothic. Therefore, also in this case, it could be useful to start with an etymological analysis.

As far as etymology is concerned, critics seem to agree that the word Gothic originally meant something that has "to do with the Goths".<sup>189</sup> As explained in *The Handbook of the Gothic*, in the beginning 'Goth' was "a simple racial term, referring to a Germanic tribe (possibly originally from Sweden). In the third to fifth centuries the tribe invaded the Eastern (Ostrogoths) and Western (Visigoths) Empire, and founded kingdoms in Italy, southern France and Spain."<sup>190</sup> Actually, the Scandinavian origin of the Goths is still a much-disputed question. What is certain is that, as noticed by Peter Heather, "Goths are first mentioned occupying territory in what is now Poland in the first century AD."<sup>191</sup> Henry Bradley observes that the first reference to the Goths can be found in a journey account made by Pytheas, a traveller from the Greek colony of Marseilles, in 300 BC. Here the Goths are called Guttones and they are described as a people living near the East Prussia trading in the amber that they gathered on the Baltic shores. After Pytheas's account, we have to wait for about four centuries to find another mention of the Goths. It is in his *Germania* (ca 98 AD), in fact, that Tacitus describes the Gotones, a Germanic tribe which had become prominent among the other Germans. According to Bradley, the Goths made a first migration from their Scandinavian homeland to the areas near the Baltic Sea and the Vistula. Then, in the third century AD, they moved again and they set up a kingdom on the former Scythian territory bordering

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<sup>185</sup> Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Cfr. p. 41.

<sup>189</sup> Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror*, cit., p. 1.

<sup>190</sup> Fanthorpe, U. A., "Goth, Gothic", in Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, ed., *The Handbook of the Gothic*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 2nd ed., pp. 126-127, p. 127.

<sup>191</sup> Heather, Peter, *The Goths*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1996, p. 2.

the Black Sea. There, in year 200, the Goths divided into two branches, the Thervings or Visigoths and the Greuteungs or Ostrogoths.<sup>192</sup>

During the Renaissance, the term Gothic was used to designate the style of architecture which had developed in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. According to Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, the origins of the Gothic architecture can be tracked back to a particular style of Northern ornamentation which appeared at first on the tombstones of Teutonic graves, and later in illuminated manuscripts and decorative carvings.<sup>193</sup> These ornamentations are characterised by

certain intertwining motifs, in earlier specimen the dot, line, and ribbon, and later the curve, circle, spiral, zigzag, and S-shape. The repertoire of motifs is extremely limited, but a great variety of combination occurs. The shapes are knotted and twisted together in frantic, springy, undulating pattern.<sup>194</sup>

Northern ornaments are subsequently incorporated by Gothic architecture, of which the Gothic cathedral is the greatest expression. In its whole structure, from “the decorative, spiral, plant tendrils adorning the capitals”,<sup>195</sup> to “the complicated carvings inside and outside the cathedral”,<sup>196</sup> it is possible to distinguish the presence of Northern ornamentations. Linda Bayer-Berenbaum observes that

The Gothic cathedral is designed to create a spiritually altered experience for those who enter, its great height and monstrous proportions dwarfing the viewer. The building is grossly out of proportion with human beings and seeks to emphasize their diminution in the face of larger and greater forces.<sup>197</sup>

In *The Gothic Cathedral*, Christopher Wilson notices that

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<sup>192</sup> Bradley, Henry, *The Goths: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Gothic Domination in Spain*, London, T. Fisher Untwin, 1887, 5th ed, [http://www.heritagehistory.com/?c=read&author=bradley&book=goths&story=\\_front](http://www.heritagehistory.com/?c=read&author=bradley&book=goths&story=_front) (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>193</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, London Associated University Press, 1982, p. 48.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

virtually all Gothic great churches inherited the basic premises of their design from the most highly evolved traditions of Romanesque architecture, those developed in northern France during the 11th century. The constituent elements of the great church type may be enumerated as follows: a cruciform plan, with a nave longer than the other three arms; a nave and possibly also other arms built to the basilican scheme, that is with side aisles and a higher and wider central vessel receiving direct lighting from a clearstorey; a middle storey of some kind between the clearstorey and the arcades separating the central vessels; longitudinal division of the arms into a series of (in theory) uniform spatial units or 'bays' articulated as a system of linked arches and cylindrical shafts: an eastern termination of complex plan, most commonly an apse with an ambulatory and radiating chapels; and one or more towers integrated into the main body of the church, usually over the centre of the cross (the crossing) or on the west façade of the nave.<sup>198</sup>

The fact that the great part of Gothic cathedrals share the elements described by Wilson does not imply that they all resemble each other. As observed by Alec Clifton-Taylor, in fact, "one of the most enjoyable characteristics of the cathedrals is their unending variety: despite affinities of detail, no two are really much alike."<sup>199</sup> As far as English Gothic cathedrals are concerned, Clifton-Taylor states that what distinguishes them from their continental counterparts is a greater attention for symmetry and the desire of reaching a balance between horizontality and verticality.<sup>200</sup> In addition to this, the appraisers of the classical style were worried by what they saw in the Gothic churches in particular – and in all Gothic in general – that is, fantasy, licence, no rules and no canons of proportions.<sup>201</sup>

The concept of fantasy is particularly relevant when speaking about the Gothic. According to Jurgis Baltrušaitis, in fact, the Middle Ages and the fantastic are strongly interwoven. He states that the fantastic in the Middle Ages has two primary sources: classical antiquity and exoticism. These two sources are tightly connected because, owing

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<sup>198</sup> Wilson, Christopher, *The Gothic Cathedral: The Architecture of the Great Church 1130-1530*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1990, p. 7.

<sup>199</sup> Clifton-Taylor, Alec, *The Cathedrals of England*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1967, revised ed. 1986, p. 10.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

to Eastern influences and contributions, the fantastic has the opportunity to renew the old tradition.<sup>202</sup>

The Gothic cathedral is a perfect example of this renovation. As already pointed out, it represents the point of intersection between the unnatural images of Roman frescoes and the Northern tradition of fantastic images, which has always been influenced by Eastern contributions. When the Goths move from the areas around the Baltic Sea and the Vistula to the territory bordering the Black Sea, in fact, they come in touch with the former Scytho-Sarmatian culture and its artistic heritage.<sup>203</sup>

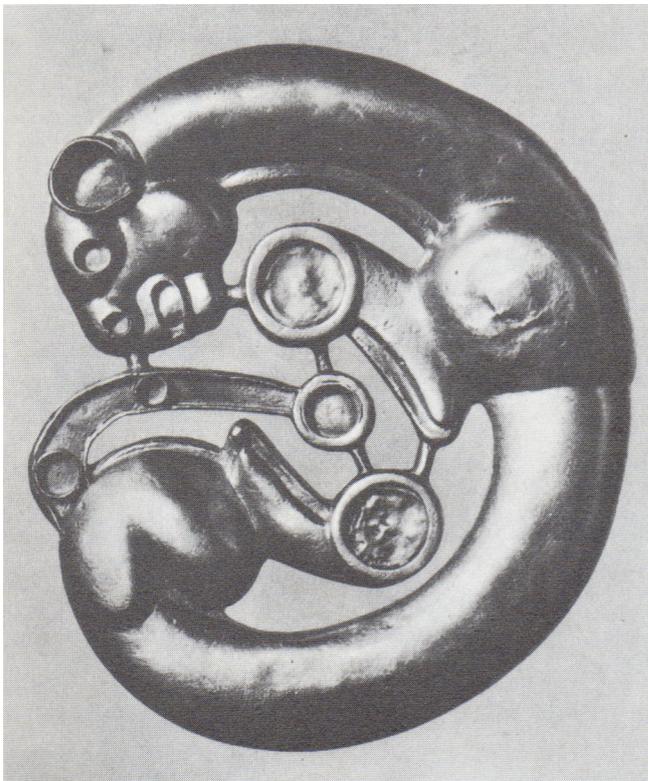


Figure 11 - A Scythian ornamental plate

As a consequence, Gothic art is contaminated by typical Scytho-Sarmatian motifs, such as heads of beasts and birds and the ribbon-beast, “created by the simple addition of animal- or bird-heads to late antique scroll or cable patterns, and to the more elaborate interlace

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<sup>202</sup> Baltrušaitis, Jurgis, *Il Medioevo fantastico: Antichità ed esotismo nell'arte gotica*, Translated by Fulvio Zuliani and F. Bovoli, Milano, Adelphi, 2009, (*Le Moyen Âge fantastique. Antiquités et exotismes dans l'art gothique*, Paris, A. Colin, 1955), pp. 39-40.

<sup>203</sup> Klingender Francis, auth., Antal, Evelyn, Harthan, John, eds., *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1971, the M.I.T. Press, 1971, p. 103.

designs imported from the Middle East."<sup>204</sup> According to Klingender, the ribbon-beast can be seen as a distortion of late Roman animal ornaments. In effect, as observed by Baltrušaitis, the motif of beast-heads has a classical origin which can be identified with the Græco-Roman *glittica*, also known as *grilli*. These terms indicated creatures whose bodies were composed by the combinations of heads. Among all the possible variations, there were also some in which human and animal heads were put together.



Figure 12 - Examples of *glittica*

<sup>204</sup> Klingender Francis, auth., Antal, Evelyn, Harthan, John, eds., *Animals in Art and Thought to the End of the Middle Ages*, cit., p. 98 and p. 105.

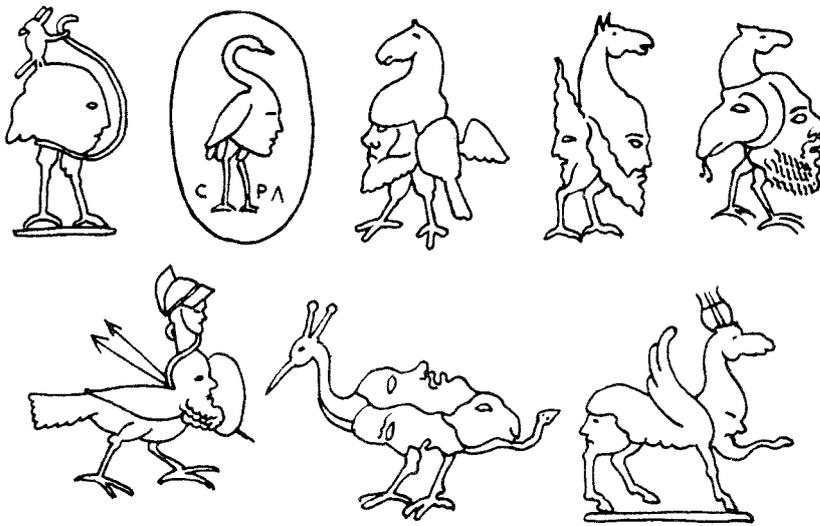


Figure 13 - Examples of griffi

The tendency to combine human and animal parts was already present in Egyptian art which, as underlined by Kenneth Clark, “continually attempted to integrate man and animal. Men, whose bodies are models of human perfection, retain the heads of birds and animal throughout Egyptian history.”<sup>205</sup> Clark suggests that the origin of this desire of fusing men and animal could be dated back to the paintings on caves of the Stone Age, which he considers as a form of totemism because they represented men’s admiration for animals and men’s will to choose “an animal as the sacred symbol of their group.”<sup>206</sup>

From their very beginning, the ornamentations of the Gothic cathedrals are characterised by the presence of animal motifs in which the fantastic element is particularly evident. Monsters which recall the old *glittica*, interlacements created by the fusion and distortion of animals and vegetables, and influenced by arabesque and mauresque style, are only some of the typical ornamentations of the Gothic cathedral.

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<sup>205</sup> Clark, Kenneth, *Animals and Men: Their Relationship as Reflected in Western Art from Prehistory to the Present Day*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1977, pp. 14-15.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.



**Figure 14** - Lincoln Cathedral (Detail of the central west door)



**Figure 15** - Canterbury Cathedral (Capitals from the crypt)



Figure 16 - Canterbury Cathedral (Capitals from the crypt)

It could be suggested that the massive presence of the animal theme is connected with the concept of totemism. Animal representations in the Gothic cathedral can be defined as apotropaic because they have to exorcise men's fears. In a sense, it could be argued that their function is identical with the function Bakhtin attributes to Carnival festivities.

As already pointed out, during the Renaissance, the term Gothic indicated the Gothic architecture so far described. In *The Gothic Flame*, Devendra P. Varma states that actually there were two different attitudes towards Gothic architecture in that period which remarkably influenced the general meaning of the word Gothic. Early Renaissance critics, in fact, held Gothic architecture in low esteem because it was linked to the Goths, a barbarian population. As a consequence, the term Gothic had a pejorative connotation, becoming synonymous with ugly and savage. In the last part of the Renaissance, instead, also thanks to a sort of medieval revival which was characterised by the spread of an antiquarian interest in the Middle Ages, the word Gothic was used to indicate anything medieval, old-fashioned or out of date.<sup>207</sup> As far as this topic is concerned, David Punter observes that "Gothic stood for the old-fashioned as opposed to the modern; the barbaric as opposed to the civilised; crudity as opposed to elegance".<sup>208</sup> Punter states that Gothic started to be conceived as opposed to 'classical' and that, in a sense, the geographical significance of the word would be replaced by a historical meaning.

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<sup>207</sup> Varma, Devendra P., *The Gothic Flame. Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England: Its Origins, Efflorescence, Disintegration, and Residuary Influences*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1957, pp. 10-13.

<sup>208</sup> Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror*, cit., p. 6.

This concept is especially evident if we take into consideration the so-called Gothic Revival which occurred between the mid-eighteenth century and the later Victorian and Edwardian periods. Victor Sage identifies five phases of the Revival: 1. the Age of Wyatt: Strawberry Hill to Fonthill, 1747-1820; 2. the Waverley Phase to Pugin, 1820-36; 3. Ecclesiology, Pugin and Gilbert Scott, 1836-55; 4. Gilbert Scott and Ruskin to Morris, 1855-72; 5. Gothic, Art Nouveau and Modernism, 1872 and beyond.<sup>209</sup> According to Sage, during its first early phase, the term Gothic was a sort of synonym of English and the word was also politically exploited by Whigs and Tories.

[...] from the Whig point of view, the Goths were a healthy freedom-loving set of Northern tribes from whom we descend and who succeeded in taking away the yoke of roman imperial domination in both religious and political senses.

For Whigs, the Gothic Revival is thus a progressive sign, of the openness of the English constitution and English Common Law which evolved organically from these Goths, who became the original inhabitants (for some they were Celts or Druids) of England. Thus, in this frame of thought, 'Gothic' connotes 'English, 'Protestant', 'democratic' and 'anti-Catholic'.

For Tory thought, on the other hand, 'Gothic' is equally 'English'; but it tends to have heraldic origins in the Anglo-Norman tradition (the architecture of which was thought of as 'Saxon' in the eighteenth century), it is Plantagenet, connotes feudalism, high Anglicanism or even Anglo-Catholicism, aristocracy, high ritual, and signifies the revival of a heroic and hierarchical vision of national religion and social organisation.<sup>210</sup>

During the Gothic Revival the term Gothic started to be applied also to the literary field. As observed by Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, in fact, "the Gothic movement in literature began in England during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and because it encompassed a general interest in the past, in archaeology, antiques and ruins, particularly those of the Middle Ages, the label *Gothic* seemed appropriate."<sup>211</sup> It is

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<sup>209</sup> For a detailed description of each phase see Sage, Victor, "Gothic Revival", in Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, ed., *The Handbook of the Gothic*, cit., pp. 156-169.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>211</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, cit., p. 19.

possible to state that while the Gothic Revival in architecture could be seen as a reaction against earlier eighteenth-century classical order and formality, in the literary field the Gothic novel could be considered as a reaction to the Enlightenment. As far as this topic is concerned, David Stevens says: "widespread awareness that over-reliance on reason could rob human experience of its essential flavour was increasingly characteristic of the age."<sup>212</sup> Indeed, Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* supports the concept, by suggesting that reason finds its foil in sublime, frightening objects which prevent its customary procedures and fill the mind with horror and terror.

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.<sup>213</sup>

The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the interior effects are admiration, reverence and respect.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>213</sup> Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London, R. & J. Dodsley, 1757, pp. 13-14.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 41-42.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, is generally acknowledged as the first Gothic novel, also because it contributed the well-known Gothic dominant tropes which can be easily identified by readers.

In *The Gothic Flame*, Varma states that the Gothic Revival had a great influence on the development of the Gothic novel, but he also identifies other causes:

- A renewed interest for the Middle Ages partly produced by the Gothic Revival;
- A growing interest for the strange and the marvellous, for questions concerning life, death and immortality, and for magic, astrology and the occult;
- A new concept of nature introduced by Rousseau, according to whom nature is wild and dynamic, it is not a pattern but a presence, "a vague and vast identity dimly astir with life, and in some dark fashion able to participate in the moods of man";<sup>215</sup>
- Graveyard poetry.<sup>216</sup>

Punter finds another cause for the spread of Gothic literature in the rise of the novel which, in turn, was made possible by the changes that had occurred in English society and by the developments of the publishing market due to the improvements of the printing techniques.

Circulating libraries<sup>217</sup> allowed a great diffusion of Gothic novels. The most famous of them was the Minerva Press Library, established in London by William Lane in 1773. It was not only a circulating library but also a printing press and it became well-

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<sup>215</sup> Varma, Devendra P., *The Gothic Flame*. cit., p. 24.

<sup>216</sup> The graveyard school was a genre of 18th-century British poetry that focused on death and bereavement. The graveyard school consisted largely of imitations of Robert Blair's popular long poem *The Grave* (1743), and of Edward Young's celebrated blank-verse dramatic rhapsody *Night Thoughts* (1742-45). These poems express the sorrow and pain of bereavement, evoke the horror of death's physical manifestations, and suggest the transitory nature of human life. The meditative, philosophical tendencies of graveyard poetry found their fullest expression in Thomas Gray's *An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard* (1751). The poem is a dignified, gently melancholy elegy celebrating the graves of humble and unknown villagers and suggesting that the lives of rich and poor alike "lead but to the grave." The works of the graveyard school were significant as early precursors of the Romantic Movement. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s. v. "graveyard school". <http://www.britannica.com/pros/lib.unimi.it/EBchecked/topic/242383/graveyard-school>. (accessed February 28, 2014).

<sup>217</sup> Circulating libraries developed during the eighteenth century and they can be considered as the forerunners of the modern system of lending libraries. Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition*, cit., p. 126.

known for the creation of thousands of Gothic publications.<sup>218</sup> Gothic novels had a great success because they represented something new in the literary panorama of the time, which addressed a wider readership, who would be emotionally involved rather than rationally interested. Maybe, looking at the specific elements of the Gothic novel it is worth tracing the impact this genre had on the publishing market. In *The Gothic Imagination* Linda Bayer-Berenbaum states that the most important feature of Gothic literature is that it shows us an extended reality which is immanent, integral and inevitably connected to the world around us, although not explained in a rational way.

The spirit does not dwell in another world; it has invaded an ordinary chair, a mirror, or a picture. The soul has not gone to heaven; the ghost lingers among the living. Furthermore, the perception of the expanded reality involves an expansion of consciousness.<sup>219</sup>

This fundamental feature, playing on the readers' emotions, implies the presence of settings which suggest that "reality may be higher and deeper and more tangled than we ordinarily think."<sup>220</sup> The description of states of mind – such as dreams, drug states, hypnotic trances, visionary experiences, or telepathic communications – which intensify normal thought or perception, the attraction to ruins, death, decay and irregularity are part of this luggage, made to arouse vivid emotions. Moreover, it is possible to find grotesque elements in Gothic novels, such as deformities and distortions, both physical and, indeed, moral. Grotesque is often used to show the underlying chaos because it

insults our need for order, for classification, matching and grouping; it violates a sense of appropriate categories. The resulting disorientation reinforces an ultimate vision of disorder at the root of the Gothic endeavour, for the rejection of all restrictions must necessarily produce chaos, a chaos similarly implied in the celebration of ruins.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition*, cit., pp. 26-27.

<sup>219</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>221</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, cit., p. 29.

Another main feature of the Gothic novels identified by Linda Bayer-Berenbaum is terror. She states that terror has a primary role in Gothic Literature because it is a reaction to threat and, at the same time, it has its own physiological quality. In terror, in fact, "a person feels powerfully present, starkly alive."<sup>222</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum also makes a distinction between terror and horror, stating that they are not interchangeable reactions to frightening experiences. Of course they both provoke fear and repulsion, but terror is more emotional than horror. The frightening experiences, which Bayer-Berenbaum speaks about, can be caused by human or natural actions but, more frequently, they depend on the supernatural. The supernatural represents "the ultimate expansion of consciousness"<sup>223</sup> and in Gothic novels it can be realised through the materialization of the spiritual – a ghost who takes form and moves a chair, for example – or through the spiritualization of the material – magic mirrors and mysterious potions are an example of this, like vampires and ghosts who represent the rejection of physical restrictions. Bayer-Berenbaum also adds that "the Gothic supernatural appears particularly real, disturbing, and uncanny, because it is so close; it permeates the world around us, looming fantastic and immediate."<sup>224</sup> In this statement it is impossible not to notice some similarities with Kayser's definition of the grotesque and with Freud's analysis of the uncanny.<sup>225</sup> As remarked in the previous paragraphs, in fact, Kayser sees the grotesque, within the alienated world, as represented by something familiar and trusted which suddenly becomes strange and disturbing. This is more or less the same concept expressed by Freud when he describes the uncanny. "The uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar"<sup>226</sup> and it can be applied to "everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open."<sup>227</sup>

There is still another relevant consideration about the Gothic. As observed by Catherine Spooner, "Gothic has never been solely a literary phenomenon. In the

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<sup>222</sup> Bayer-Berenbaum, Linda, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, cit., p. 31.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Cfr. p. 49.

<sup>226</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, Translated by David McLintock, London with an Introduction by Hugh Haughton, Penguin Books, 2003 (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919), p. 124.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

eighteenth century, the public appetite for horrid thrills found satisfaction not only in fiction, but also in magic-lantern shows and sensational theatre productions.”<sup>228</sup> This connection between the Gothic and visual culture has widened in the following centuries till nowadays, when the Gothic is “all pervasive”<sup>229</sup> and influences all sorts of media, including television, cinema, comics, video games, the world-wide web and music. In the late 1970s there was also the beginning of a Goth subculture which is still in fashion, and which has transformed the Gothic “into a visual look, a subgenre of popular music and a lifestyle.”<sup>230</sup>

### 2.3 Conclusive Remarks about the Grotesque and the Gothic

With the analysis so far carried on, I hope to have shown that Gothic architecture and Gothic Literature are strongly connected and that, as pinpointed by Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, it is possible to draw a parallel between Gothic techniques in art and in literature. What is aroused in Gothic architecture through structural elements and ornamentation, is also evoked through words and literary devices in Gothic literature. I also have underlined the common elements shared by the grotesque and the Gothic, which allow us not to consider them as two distinct entities but as a multifaceted whole, characterised by infinite shades.

However, to conclude this overview about the grotesque and the Gothic, I would like to introduce some key-point concerning their relationship with children's literature. The grotesque and the Gothic have always been present in children's literature. In *Funny Bodies*, Andrew states that “literature for children has been full of hybrids since the very beginning”.<sup>231</sup> In effect, we can find examples of grotesque elements in children's literature in the talking animals of Aesop, in some illustrations contained in Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, in traditional fairy tales, children's lore and nursery rhymes. Despite

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<sup>228</sup> Spooner, Catherine, “Gothic Media”, in Spooner, Catherine, McEvoy, Emma, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Gothic Literature*, cit., pp. 195-197, p. 195.

<sup>229</sup> Cfr. p. 35.

<sup>230</sup> Spooner, Catherine, “Gothic Media”, in Spooner, Catherine, McEvoy, Emma, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Gothic Literature*, cit., pp. 195-197, p. 195.

<sup>231</sup> Casson, Andrew, *Funny Bodies: Transgressional and Grotesque Humour in English Children's Literature*, cit., p. 27.

this evidence, critics do not generally take into consideration the grotesque in children's literature and scholars specialised in the grotesque seem to be unaware of the fact that "children's literature is a gold mine of examples for their theories."<sup>232</sup> As far as the Gothic is concerned, the editors of *The Gothic in Children's Literature* notice that children "have always had a predilection for what we now categorize as the Gothic, for ghosts and goblins, hauntings and horrors, fear and the pretence of fear."<sup>233</sup> They suggest that children used to read Gothic stories long before children's literature was invented, and that the development of the Gothic novel, which took place in the eighteenth century, could be simply considered as a shift in the audience: the Gothic narrative is no more addressed to children but to adults. This change is partly due to the fact that grotesque and Gothic elements started to be considered as not suitable for children in that period. The fundamental question was "what are adults to print for children?"<sup>234</sup> Actually, this is a primary question also nowadays. We have to keep in mind, in fact, that children's literature is characterised by the presence of a double reader. Children's books are obviously addressed to children but they are written, published and chosen for them by adults.

However, despite all the attempts to suppress grotesque and Gothic elements in children's books, they succeeded to survive and today it is quiet easy to see that children's literature definitely has a grotesque and Gothic flavour. Some critics, such as David Stevens, see in the grotesque and Gothic elements contained in children's books a medium to tempt children and young adults to read. "Macabre features, even – perhaps especially – in young children's picture books, often succeed in persuading otherwise reluctant readers that there is something entertaining to be had from books."<sup>235</sup> But is this the only function of the grotesque and the Gothic in children's literature? I should like to find appropriate answers to this and other questions concerning the grotesque and the Gothic in children's literature, through the analysis of picturebooks realised by a

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<sup>232</sup> Casson, Andrew, *Funny Bodies: Transgressional and Grotesque Humour in English Children's Literature*, cit., p. 28.

<sup>233</sup> Jackson, Anna, Coats, Karen, McGillis, Roderick, eds., *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> Casson, Andrew, *Funny Bodies: Transgressional and Grotesque Humour in English Children's Literature*, cit., p. 38.

<sup>235</sup> Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 33.

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group of illustrators who lived between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Their style indeed, in the light of the survey I have just offered, can be classed as “grotesque” or, also, “Gothic”.