

Gothic Horror

Rather than using ghosts and monsters to provide elements of horror, Gothic Fiction tends to focus on what is possible but mysterious or bizarre to generate fear. Bleak isolated places, old houses, deserted mansions, remote parts of the world all feature heavily. Scientific advances are often the source of evil (e.g. Frankenstein) and insanity or other strange 'powers of the mind' are also favourites. Perhaps because of man's unceasing exploration of the world and incredible scientific progress Gothic Horror also frequently talks about man taking things too far and knowing things that should not be known. The darkly occult, more than the straight forwardly magic are also key elements of Gothic writing.

It is true that I have sent six bullets through the head of my best friend, and yet I hope to show by this statement that I am not his murderer. At first I shall be called a madman – madder than the man I shot in his cell at the Arkham Sanatorium. Later some of my readers will weigh each statement, correlate it with the known facts, and ask themselves how I could have believed otherwise than as I did after facing the evidence of that horror – that thing on the doorstep.

Until then I also saw nothing but madness in the wild tales I have acted on. Even now I ask myself whether I was misled – or whether I am not mad after all. I do not know – but others have strange things to tell of Edward and Asenath Derby, and even the stolid police are at their wits' end to account for that last terrible visit. They have tried weakly to concoct a theory of a ghastly jest or warning by discharged servants, yet they know in their hearts that the truth is something infinitely more terrible and incredible.

So I say that I have not murdered Edward Derby. Rather have I avenged him, and in so doing purged the earth of a horror whose survival might have loosed untold terrors on all mankind. There are black zones of shadow close to our daily paths, and now and then some evil soul breaks a passage through. When that happens, the man who knows must strike before reckoning the consequences.

Edward was thirty eight when he met Asenath Waite ... she was Ephram Waite's daughter – the child of his old age by an unknown wife who always went veiled. Ephram lived in a half-decayed mansion in Washington Street, Innsmouth, and those who had seen the place (Arkham folk avoid going to Innsmouth whenever they can) declared that the attic windows were always boarded up, and that strange sounds sometimes floated from within as evening drew on. The old man was known to have been a prodigious magical student in his day, and legend averred that he could raise or quell storms at sea according to his whim. I had seen him once or twice in my youth as he came to Arkham to consult forbidden tomes at the college library, and had hated his wolfish, saturnine face with its tangle of iron grey beard. He had died insane – under rather queer circumstances – just before his daughter (by his will made a minimal ward of the principal) entered the Hall School, but she had been his morbidly avid pupil and looked fiendishly like him at times.

Comment [K1]: Clearly a shocking and attention grabbing opening line

Comment [K2]: Madness and asylums are favourite subjects and settings for the gothic writer. Often madness resulting from having 'seen too much' or giving someone the ability to see further than the normal human

Comment [K3]: The focus on plausibility and realism is an important element here

Comment [K4]: The vagueness of this sentence is obviously intended to create interest and curiosity. As is its placement as a cliff hanger at the end of the paragraph

Comment [K5]: The readers are still not given any clue as to what these 'wild tales' are but continual references to them further piques our curiosity

Comment [K6]: Continued mysterious, but ultimately plausible and realistic, vagueness

Comment [K7]: The implication is that the implication is beyond the straight forwardly rational

Comment [K8]: Continued references to things the reader does not understand – what servants, what jest, what truth, further enhance the mystery

Comment [K9]: A continued sense of uncertainty runs through the text. If our narrator is mad then how can we trust what he says?

Comment [K10]: An occult reference and the proximity to our daily lives makes it even more threatening. Clearly here the idea is that the 'evil' can break through into our world but the counterpart of this idea is that this darkness is also accessible to us through experiment and exploration if we push things too far.

Comment [K11]: Names heavy with oddness

Comment [K12]: Realistic but mysterious

Comment [K13]: Perfect gothic novel setting

Comment [K14]: Still nothing distinctly odd, supernatural or out place has happened. Gothic horror has a knack of re-interpreting the everyday to make it seem threatening

Comment [K15]: Classic villain description

Comment [K16]: Madness once again

Comment [K17]: Continued references to vague sadness

Comment [K18]: A hint of where the mystery might lie in the story. The body of the daughter in the end 'turns out' to be inhabited by the spirit of the old man