‘Two kinds of romance’: generic hybridity and mongrel monsters from Gothic novel to Paranormal Romance

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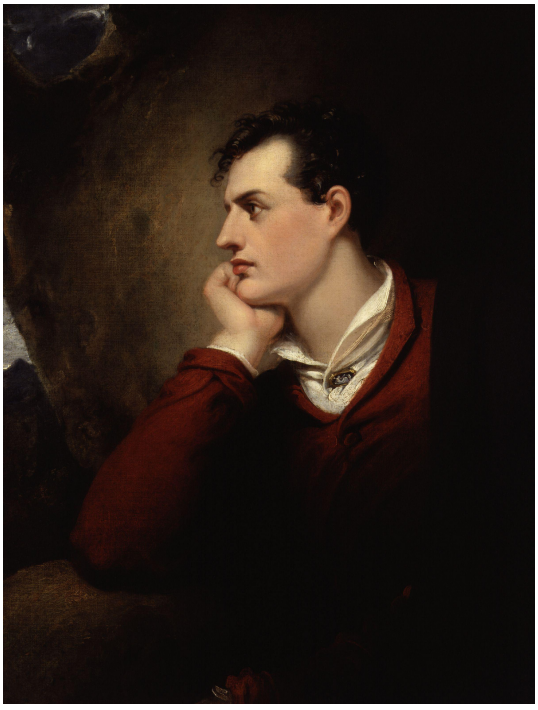
The genealogy of the demonic lover has roots in the monstrous couplings from ancient myth, old ballads, and ‘Beauty and the Beast’. The line runs through Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa*, touched by Milton’s Satan, to the vampire created in Byron’s image—or self-image—by Polidori and, separately, to the dark heroes of the Brontës, Daphne du Maurier, and Mills and Boon.



It is familiar now in the recently emerged genre of Paranormal Romance, where

themes from Gothic horror are modulated by romantic fiction, and vampires, werewolves, and others become humanised as love objects. Thus a hybrid genre features creatures whose monstrous nature is compromised and made mongrel by traces of humanity.

I'm going to trace how these hybrid encounters recur at key moments and show how the coupling of romance and novel, and of monster and human, dramatises discordant perspectives.

Two kinds of romance

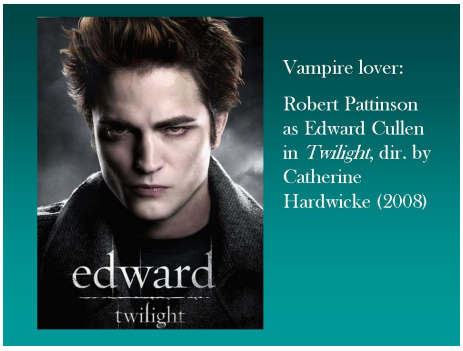
Horace Walpole inaugurates the Gothic novel with, as he says in the Preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, an intention 'to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern'—or what we now call the Romance proper and the novel—so that 'imagination and improbability' are rendered with verisimilitude.[1]

Contemporary Gothic has been further novelised, sometimes through a greater attention to characterisation, and with the marvellous appearing amidst quotidian settings. But it has also been 'romanced' in new ways. Walpole aimed to blend the Romance and the novel; it might be more accurate to talk of one genre modulating the other, after Alastair Fowler.[2] Very recently, an additional modulation has taken place: of Gothic by 'romance' in its present-day sense of fictions centred on romantic love. A new subgenre has emerged, one adumbrated by Fred Botting's notion of 'Gothic Romanced'.[3] I'll be showing that it's not actually so new; there's something more like a periodic return taking place.

Paranormal Romance

In recent years, the new genre of popular fiction Paranormal Romance has made a dramatic emergence, most notoriously with Stephenie Mayer's *Twilight* (2005). Paranormal Romance takes the plot conventions of romance fiction and stylises it with a Gothic mood. All the dark dangers and terrors of the Gothic give an edge to the sunniness of romance by depicting monstrous lovers. Thus humans have love affairs with all manner of supernatural creatures that once haunted tales of sheer horror, humanising the Gothic mode while problematising romance.

One aspect of the sympathetic monsters of this new genre is that they are a means of tackling issues of the contemporary politics of identity by representing outsiders, or 'Others', as the demon lover figure. So racial and ethnic others, people with alternative sexualities, and so on—once the monsters of horror—become assimilated to society through these Gothic-styled love stories.



Vampire lover:

Robert Pattinson as Edward Cullen in *Twilight*, dir. by Catherine Hardwicke (2008)

It's the contemporary vampire, with all their sexiness and ambiguous threat that we're most familiar with as monstrous lover in paranormal romance. You all know *Twilight*, I'm sure, but the genre of paranormal romance—where mortals have love affairs with supernatural creatures—is vastly prolific. The demon lover can be vampire, werewolf or other shapeshifter; there are affairs with demons and angels, zombies, ghosts, even gargoyles.

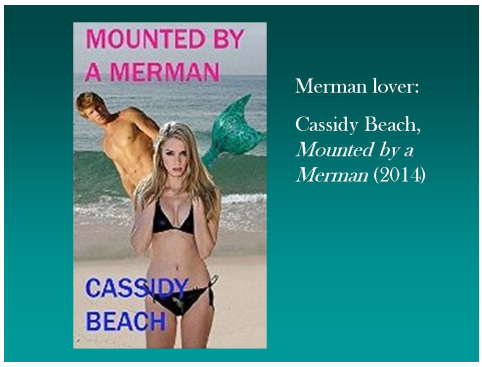
Zombie lover:

Nicholas Hoult as R in *Warm Bodies*, dir. by Jonathan Levine (2013)

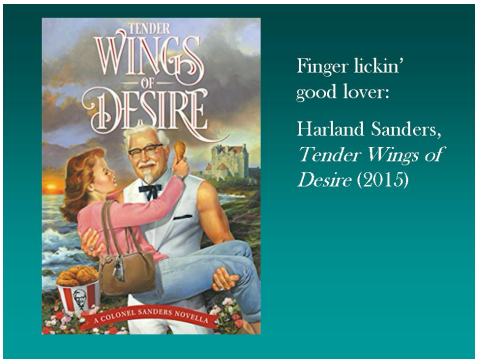
Gargoyle lover:

Mel Teshco, *Stone Cold Lover* (2015)

The merman always seems to be a favourite.



But even more terrible demonic lovers have since emerged.



Gothic Romance

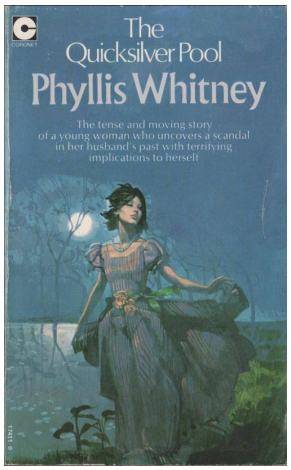
However, I want to point out an intermediate generic shift, another moment when Gothic returns to the imbrication with 'romance' that was already at the heart of Ann Radcliffe.

The Gothic modulations of *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are well known (their allusions to vampires, their spirits, the ominous mansions and bleak, forbidding landscapes). Likewise, the presence of *Jane Eyre* in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and the Gothic roots of her writing have been much explored. And these devices are bequeathed to paranormal romance.

As part of my research into how different genres encounter each other to generate this new kind of novel, I've been immersing myself into one of its forbears: Gothic Romance (sometimes known as fantasy romance or romantic fantasy), which proliferated from the 1950s to the 1970s. Joe Crawford has already highlighted this in his excellent book *The Twilight of the Gothic*; I came to this by a different route and want to look more closely at these texts.[4] The paranormal romance writer Sarah Rees Brennan cites as influences 'all three Brontë sisters, Daphne du Maurier, Edgar Allan Poe', then 'Mary Stewart, Barbara Michaels, Victoria Holt, [and] Madeleine Brent'.[5]

These novels rarely embrace the supernatural; it may be suggested but it is

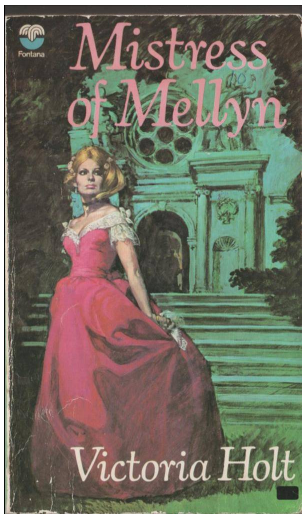
usually resolved in the manner of Ann Radcliffe's novels. But key motifs of moonlight, darkness, and shadows; subterranean passages and caverns abound—the covers are revealing here.



The protagonists are endangered, vulnerable (though often plucky) young women—orphans, governesses, or companions. The hero will be brooding and have dark secrets. There may be indecision by the heroine in her choice of love object between two men, one who seems more benign than the other (but appearances are often deceptive). Often an antiquated family home is central; abbeys or castles may appear.

The original Gothics often took their names from an important house or building: *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*; Eliza Parsons's *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793); Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey* (1800). Parodies play on this, of course: *Northanger Abbey*, *Nightmare Abbey*.

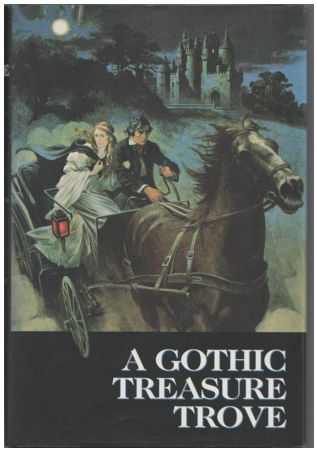
Du Maurier's *Rebecca* famously invokes Manderley in the opening lines.



Many Gothic Romances revitalise this device: there's *Jessamy Court*, *Lyonesse Abbey*, *Crow Hollow*. Often, the house is emphatically linked with lineage and property: Emma Parker's 1811 *Elfrida, Heiress of Belgrove* gives way to Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960).[6]

The covers of these novels are highly atmospheric and portray those Gothic themes; likewise, the gloriously

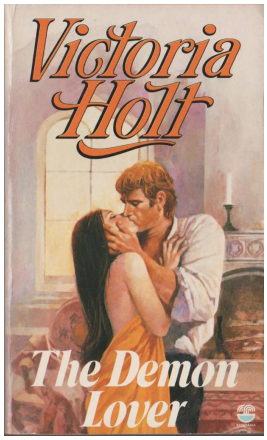
kitschy illustrations in the Reader's Digest anthology I found, *A Gothic Treasure Trove* (2001).



This collection is laden with paratextual markings of the Gothic, from the cover and the illustrations to the blurb on the back of the dust jacket, which characterises the anthologised works as 'A Gothic novel which fulfils the old traditions of brooding atmosphere, suspense and romance', 'remains taut as it moves from castle to cave to scaffold and from disaster to deception', and 'suspenseful and bewitching'.

Demon lovers

Like earlier Gothic, the protagonist is often a vulnerable young woman: orphan, governess, companion, or dependent. It is characteristic of Gothic Romance that the heroine is plunged into dependency at the beginning of the book, very often economic dependency following the death of their father, and emotional dependency too. The 'Cinderella' plot is common.



Demon lovers appear in this genre but not in supernatural form (here's Victoria Holt's 1982 *The Demon Lover*). They do, however, get labelled with supernatural epithets; they're 'satanic', 'demonic', 'Luciferean', and so on, just as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is repeatedly described as 'Devil' or 'demon'.[7]

Here's Laurence Olivier showing his tender side as the quintessentially demonic lover, Heathcliff, in the 1939 William Wyler film. But note how the pose is also somewhat vampiric (the book actually talks of him as

'vampire'); this image of the monster at the bedside recurs many times; here's Bela Lugosi in Tod Browning's 1931 *Dracula*.

Lord Mortmain, the scarred hero of Jill Tattersall's *The Wild Hunt* (1974), 'was probably handsome once, like Lucifer' says a character (32). The hero of Madeleine Brent's *Tregaron's Daughter* (1971), who has 'a faintly satanic look', is named 'Lucian', which the heroine associates with Lucifer (26). In Barbara Michaels's *Wait for What Will Come* (1978), the demon lover motif in folklore is explicitly discussed; the legend that haunts the present is, in fact, about a merman! (35-41; 83-92).

These novels are doing something different from paranormal romance, yet using the same devices. In the original Gothic, the monstrous male is not the lover. In Gothic romance, demonic villain and hero become conflated, as they will in paranormal romance. But while in paranormal romance the demon lover represents otherness across a range of previously outcast identities, in Gothic romance it is simply the alienation between the sexes at play. But that's not quite all: in Richardson's novels there was a kind of class conflict that constituted the threat of the male lover as much as just masculinity. In Gothic romance, there are similarly issues of economic powerlessness being dramatised.

Self-conscious intertextuality

One recurring feature is an ironic nod to the generic ancestry, where the scene is compared to one from a Gothic novel, only to shrug it off with realism. This, in a

way, is a variant on the epistemological hesitation of the fantastic.

So, in Barbara Michaels, *Ammie, Come Home* (1968), we have: 'She was standing there, on the landing, looking like something out of Mrs Radcliffe'.[8] In her *Wait for What Will Come* (1978), she talks of 'the Gothic horrors of "Monk" Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe' (200). Jill Tattersall's *Lyonesse Abbey* (1968) features a chapel 'which was as romantic a heap of ivied stone as ever lover of the Gothic sighed over' (103). The Brontës are frequently invoked—as they are in paranormal romance; *Twilight* constantly references *Wuthering Heights*. Mary Stewart, in *Thunder on the Right* (1957), deliberately invokes Ann Radcliffe, acknowledging her Gothic origins. Here, the heroine visits a convent in France in quest of her vanished friend: and encounters a young door-keeper whose eyes seem to hold some 'obscure horror':

> Something, Jennifer told herself sharply, that was being dragged up out of the depths of the subconscious, where half a hundred romantic tales had contributed to feed the secular mind with a superstitious fear of the enclosing convent walls. This [. . .] was not a story in the Radcliffe vein, where monastic cells and midnight terrors followed one another as the night the day, this was not a Transylvanian gorge in the dead hour of darkness. It was a small and peaceful institution, run on medieval lines perhaps, but nevertheless basking in the warm sunshine of a civilized afternoon. (26)

Yet this deflation of Radcliffe is a narrative ploy, of course, as the discerning reader will know, and ironises the heroine's innocence of what will follow. And note Stewart's Radcliffean use of Continental Europe as otherness is still potent, including a Catholicism that is in opposition to enlightened progress.

Genre shifts

Genres shift, in part, as the Russian Formalists and Czech Structuralists showed, because their capacity to make things strange wears out and new devices are required to combat the familiarisation of dead literature. The Formalist Shklovsky wrote: 'A new form comes into being not to express a new content, but to replace an old form that has lost its artistic character'.[9] But this isn't entirely the case; such changes often coincide with socio-cultural shifts. Generic shifts can both defamiliarise well-worn forms and also enable new perspectives to emerge.

Why do certain plot devices and tropes no longer arouse excitement? In part, because the readers' dreams and worldviews have shifted. You can't rule out marketing pressures either—though this raises questions about the complex interaction between desire and the market, why and how they respond to each other and motivate each other.

Certain shifts occurred in the two periods when Gothic Romance and then Paranormal Romance evolved. For the latter, it's significant that around the 1980s there was an assimilation of identities, most commonly race and sexuality, which once were inscribed within the monster. With Gothic Romance, the 1940s-1950s saw the rise of women's economic independence and, in the latter part of this period, of a new wave of feminism. So the heroines in Gothic Romance are, to varying degrees, rather vigorous than passive—but still vulnerable in the mode of classic Gothic.

Genres can be associated with epistemological perspectives, with ways of knowing, or questioning, the world. As Bakhtin says: 'In an intentional novelistic hybrid [. . .], the important activity is not only [. . .] the mixing of linguistic forms [. . .] as it is the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms.'[10] So what happens to these perspectives when contrasting genres interact? The initial generic hybridity which Walpole signals is directly related to ambivalence over Enlightenment, and this instability characterises the Gothic's successors to this day.

What is Gothic about Gothic Romance? Most Gothic Romances (though not all) eschew the supernatural. I'd suggest that there's a confidence in the scientific-rationalist worldview in the '50s and '60s that's lost in the late twentieth century. And that's also the case with at least Radcliffean Gothic (with its well-known 'supernatural explained'). Radcliffe, I'd argue, was on the side of the Enlightenment and actively pitted against superstition; Gothic Romance doesn't need to combat that in the same way. Radcliffe actively promotes the scientific attitude in places. In contrast, Paranormal Romance readmits the supernatural, and there is often a hesitancy between magical and scientific worldviews that may echo a certain postmodern doubt.

Terror

I think there's a further continuity with Radcliffe. Terror in Edmund Burke, provoked by the sublime, 'robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning'. But not so in Radcliffe. If we take up her famous distinction, and I believe it is a useful one, the

mode of Gothic Romance is terror rather than horror. In Radcliffe's dialogue: 'terror and horror are so far opposite', her speaker declares, 'that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them'.[11] Gothic romance very often (and paranormal romance more hesitantly) affirm the agency and rationalist humanism that terror enables.

All this relates, distantly (and very tentatively at this phase of my research), to the way Romance harmonises the Gothic in both Gothic Romance and paranormal romance, particularly in the YA incarnations of the latter. These novels emphasise existential choice and moral autonomy, and the resistance to fatalism.[12] Of course, this is in tension with a mood of fatality, especially in Gothic Romance.

Conclusion

I must admit to enjoying these novels enormously. They're well-crafted, stylistically interesting, with gripping plots and often engaging characters. Among other things, they capture well a utopian aspiration of mutuality between the sexes. They are not as ideologically regressive as one might expect. Stewart's novels in particular explore ideas of masculinity and heroism, and have a distinctly feminist strand of female autonomy together with a critique of masculinist values.

The uneasy mating of Gothic and romance humanises the former in quite special ways, focusing on agency (which the inexorable doom of horror often denies) and on the human intersubjectivity found in the realist novel. At the same time, it desentimentalises romantic fiction, revealing the darker aspects of eroticism or even human existence itself. We can also learn much about how genre works from these demonic, mongrel lovers in unusual love matches, inhabiting hybrid, contradictory couplings of kinds of romances.

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[1] Horace Walpole, Preface to the second edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. and intr. by W.S. Lewis (1764; 2nd edn 1765; Oxford: Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 1982), pp. 7-12 (p. 7). For the Romance genre, see Gillian Beer, *The Romance*, The Critical Idiom, 10 (London and New York: Methuen, 1970); Barbara Fuchs, *Romance*, The New Critical Idiom (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Fredric Jameson, 'Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism', in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 103-50. For the emergence of the novel and its relationship to Romance, see J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York and London: W.W. Norton,

1990), though the literature is vast. For Romance, romantic fiction, and women readers, see Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984); Jean Radford, ed., *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction*, Questions for Feminism (London: Verso, 1987); Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1994); again, there is a huge body of work in this area.

[2] See *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). In looking at the transformations of genre, I have also found the following of use: Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Origin of Genres', in *Genres in Discourse*, trans, by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Hans Robert Jauss, 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature', in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti, intr. by Paul de Man, Theory and History of Literature, 2 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 76-109; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Marxist Introductions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 173-91; Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Literature, Culture, Theory, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3] Fred Botting, *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

[4] Joseph Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic: Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance*, Gothic Literary Studies (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014).

[5] Sarah Rees Brennan, *Unspoken*, Lynburn Legacy, 1 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), p. 373.

[6] See Franz J. Potter, *The History of Gothic Publishing, 1800-1835: Exhuming the Trade* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 155.

[7] See Crawford, p. 34

[8] Barbara Michaels, *Ammie, Come Home* (New York, Harper Collins, 1968), p. 87.

[9] Shklovsky, cited in Juri Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Stucturalism Reconsidered*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 30.

[10] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', pp. 360-61.

[11] 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826).

[12] See, as example, Barbara Michaels's *The Master of Blacktower* (New York, Harper Collins, 1966), p. 49.