

INTRODUCTION TO THE BASICS OF THE GOTHIC LITERARY GENRE

Gothic fiction, which is largely known by the subgenre of **Gothic horror**, is a genre or mode of literature that combines fiction and horror, death, and at times romance. Its origin is attributed to English author Horace Walpole, with his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, subtitled (in its second edition) "A Gothic Story". Gothic fiction tends to place emphasis on both emotion and a pleasurable kind of terror, serving as an extension of the Romantic literary movement that was relatively new at the time that Walpole's novel was published. The most common of these "pleasures" among Gothic readers was the sublime—an indescribable feeling that "takes us beyond ourselves".

The literary genre originated in England in the second half of the 18th century where, following Walpole, it was further developed by Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford and Matthew Lewis. The genre had much success in the 19th century, as witnessed in prose by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe as well as Charles Dickens with his novella, *A Christmas Carol*, and in poetry in the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Lord Byron. Another well known novel in this genre, dating from the late Victorian era, is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

This extreme form of Romanticism was very popular throughout Europe, especially among English- and German-language writers and artists. The English Gothic novel also led to new novel types such as the German *Schauerroman* (Schauer-literally meaning to shudder) and the French *roman noir*.

The Gothic literary genre is a very popular one and “gothic” means a particular kind of text. These texts have identifiable characteristics and motifs. The very word “gothic” would make us imagine strange or even perverse settings and stories and the subject matter is –or can be thought of as – more illegitimate rather than legitimate. These simple facts can be considered as some of the defining ideas behind gothic literature.

As well known, the “gothic family” has a whole list of genres within it; apart from the novels, it includes poems, plays, films, music, opera, comics, video games and even fashion and it is popular to this day. The “gothic” is a term which derives from the medieval world and all these array of generic narratives and visual items have a very recognizable set of attributes.

T H E
CASTLE of OTRANTO,
A
GOTHIC STORY.

——— *Vana*
Fingentur species, tamen ut Pes, & Caput uni
Reddantur formæ. ———
H O R.

THE THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N:
Printed for WILLIAM BATHOE in the Strand.
M.DCC.LXVI.

The coining of the gothic style, starting with *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (published 1764) has the first reference to the term “gothic story”. What is meant by the “gothic story” is that it is primarily “barbarous” and secondly derives from the Middle Ages –even earlier since it directly refers to the names of barbaric Germanic/Teutonic tribes such as the Ostrogoths (Kingdom of Italy) and Visigoths (Kingdom of Spain) moving towards the West (central/south Europe) due to the Hun raiders pushing from the east and sacking the Roman Empire in the process. These two basic specifications – the being barbarous and the medieval reference are usually the most prominent features associated with the gothic. In other words we are guided towards a less sophisticated and more ancient understanding and these two primary attributes are the first features to look for in a gothic narrative.

The Monk by Lewis for example is another famous work of gothic fiction and looking at its original cover given below; you can see the extended title and the image; it up-front reveals the contents to the reader as well as creating a list of the key features and key players characteristic of the gothic narrative:



See p. 33.

THE MONK,

A Romance;

IN WHICH IS DEPICTED THE

Wonderful Adventures of Ambrosio,

FRIAR OF THE ORDER OF CAPUCHINS,

WHO WAS DIVERTED FROM THE TRACK OF VIRTUE BY THE

Artifices of a Female Demon,

That entered his Monastery disguised as a Novice, and after seducing him from his

VOW OF CELIBACY,

PRESENTED HIM WITH

A Branch of Enchanted Myrtle,

TO OBTAIN THE PERSON OF THE BEAUTIFUL

Antonia of Madrid;

HOW HE WAS

DISCOVERED IN HER CHAMBER

BY

HER MOTHER, WHOM HE MURDERED,

To keep his Crime a Secret;

And the Particulars of the Means by which he caused the

Body of Antonia

To be conveyed in a Sleep to the

DREARY VAULTS OF HIS OWN CONVENT,

WHERE HE

ACCOMPLISHED HIS WICKED MACHINATIONS

On the Innocent Virgin, whom he then

ASSASSINATES WITH A DAGGER,

PRESENTED HIM BY HIS ATTENDANT FIEND,

Who afterward Betrays him to the

Judges of the Inquisition,

In the Dungeons of which he is Confined, and suffers Torture; and how, to Escape from thence, he Assigns over his

Soul and Body to the Devil,

Who Deceives him, and Inflicts a

MOST IGNOMINIOUS DEATH.

LONDON:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY W. MASON,
21, CLERKENWELL GREEN.

SIXPENCE.

The Monk is a “gothic romance” in which the wondrous adventures of Ambrosio -who is a friar of the order of Capuchins’- are narrated. Taking a closer look, the title is quite interesting and descriptive of the narrative, featuring a “female demon” for instance and the story of a “The Bleeding Nun”. Ambrosia is diverted from the path of virtue by the artifices of this female demon and hereby introducing the element of the supernatural into the narrative. Hence the presence of the supernatural is also one of the features of the gothic just as much as the elements of the (natural) sublime in order to evoke terror – or the *unheimlich* effect.

To explain further, the supernatural is understood as something “that is above nature or belonging to a higher realm or system as that of nature”. This introduction brings another Gothic element into the book. Up until the introduction of the supernatural element the plot relies on natural elements of the sublime to invoke the terror expected of a Gothic novel – Which is yet another typical feature of the gothic. With the entrance of the Bleeding Nun, this natural world is transformed into a world where the supernatural is possible. When she gets into Raymond's carriage, “Immediately thick clouds obscured the sky: The winds howled around us, the lightning flashed, and the Thunder roared tremendously”. This scene is interpreted as nature acknowledging the presence of a supernatural force. In general, just by looking at the extended title it is possible to see all kinds of unnatural and/or illegitimate items such as demons, magic, enchantments, sin – or sinfulness, murder etc.

It should be noted that not only in *The Castle of Otranto* but also in *The Monk*, the settings like the castle itself or the convent featured in *The Monk* are directly related to the gothic in the sense of architectural style- which is the origin of the term as used during the Middle Ages. This is emphasizing another prominent quality of the gothic, which is relayed in the setting/atmosphere deliberate to evoke terror by making use of eerie, ancient looking places, ruins (*Castle of Otranto*, *Dracula*) vast open grounds like wastelands (*Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*) or at least a housing which does not emanate domestic harmony and decaying mansions or the home becoming supernaturally hostile (*House of Usher*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Great Expectations*) in service of creating the “sublime experience” link to the feeling of unease and terror. In an enlarged scope, gothic setting is more about the feeling it evokes rather than the location. In this sense, any space can become gothic if it is not deemed “home”, if it is literally “unheimlich”/uncanny and unfamiliar. In other words, even if familiar, if the space or the familiarity of the space/location is turned upside

down; inside out and de-familiarized (even the own home or town etc.), any setting can be labeled as gothic.

It can be surmised that the supernatural plays a key role in gothic literature. In other words, we either have the supernatural – figures such as demons, Satan, magical creatures etc. or THE PROMISE of the supernatural. Even though the supernatural may not be present in a concrete manner, there are suggestions of the supernatural in the gothic work. The presence or lack of a supernatural element may- or may not turn out to be true. This keeps-up the suspense and elongates the hesitation span which Todorov later refers to as “the fantastic”.

The next feature characteristic of the genre is the discovery of some mysterious element from the (near) past or an ancient secret revealed. In other words “antiquity is unearthed”. This relation to the operative term “antiquity” is again enhanced by the setting which is –as mentioned- a prominent feature of the genre. Hence gothic architecture is promoted in depicting strange places, threatening environments, remote landscapes; ruins are utilized to point towards the sublime also by emphasizing the effect of vastness on human emotions such as the “arctic wasteland” in Shelly’s *Frankenstien*. The relation built towards the sublime suggests an interpretation where these “strange and terrifying” landscapes become the “other” to the norm. By evoking the unheimlich/uncanny feeling they are too in pointing in the direction of the Lacanian “Big Other” by emphasizing the Kantian sublime. These settings are also often associated with some form of sexual enticement (like in *The Monk*). The perpetrators/villains within the gothic setting are true to the definition of the term and are barbarous either physically or they terrorize their victim emotionally, the victim being the protagonist. This brings us to one of the primary characteristics of a gothic protagonist which is “vulnerability”.

In terms of protagonists, we are often confronted with vulnerable protagonists (Like Antonio- a vulnerable maiden who is assaulted and assassinated in *The Monk*), she is one of the key identifiable protagonists of gothic fiction under the category of “victimized women”. As well as vulnerable young men –in the sense of being open to manipulation or emotionally sensitive- being featured as protagonists are typical for the genre. It should be noted that the initial understanding of the gothic becomes somewhat tweaked/twisted in the Victorian period-specifically in the late Victorian period. And as opposed to the victimized female, the “vulnerable young man” also gains on prominence during this period within the genre.

Victorian Gothic:

By the Victorian era, Gothic had ceased to be the dominant genre, and was dismissed by most critics. However, in many ways, it was now entering its most creative phase. By the early 1800s readers and critics began to reconsider a number of previously overlooked Penny Blood or "penny dreadful" serial fictions by such authors as George W. M. Reynolds who wrote a trilogy of Gothic horror novels: *Faust* (1846), *Wagner the Wehr-wolf* (1847) and *The Necromancer* (1857). Reynolds was also responsible for *The Mysteries of London* which has been accorded an important place in the development of the urban as a particularly Victorian Gothic setting. Another famous penny dreadful of this era was the anonymously authored *Varney the Vampire* (1847). *Varney* is the tale of the vampire Sir Francis Varney, and introduced many of the tropes present in vampire fiction recognizable to modern audiences (the first story to refer to sharpened teeth for a vampire).

An important and innovative re-interpreter of the Gothic in this period was Edgar Allan Poe. Poe focused less on the traditional elements of gothic stories and more on the psychology of his characters as they often descended into madness. Poe's critics complained about his "German" tales, to which he replied, 'that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul'. Poe, a critic himself, believed that terror was a legitimate literary subject. His story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) explores these 'terrors of the soul' while revisiting classic Gothic tropes of aristocratic decay, death, and madness. The legendary villainy of the Spanish Inquisition was previously explored by Gothicists Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin.

The influence of Byronic Romanticism evident in Poe is also apparent in the work of the Brontë sisters. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) transports the Gothic to the forbidding Yorkshire Moors –emphasizing the feeling of vastness- and features ghostly apparitions and a Byronic hero in the person of the demonic Heathcliff. Note that the double protagonists of equal weight -who mutually identify within each other (Catharine famously declares "I am Heathcliff)- are two sides of one coin and are a perfect example to the vulnerable protagonist)

The Brontës' fiction is seen by some feminist critics as prime examples of Female Gothic, exploring woman's entrapment within domestic space and subjection to patriarchal authority and the transgressive and dangerous attempts to subvert and escape such restriction. Emily's *Cathy* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are both examples of female protagonists in such a role where the feature of entrapped vulnerable protagonist is once more emphasized.

The mood and themes of the Gothic novel held a particular fascination for the Victorians, with their morbid obsession with mourning rituals, mementos, and mortality in general. The 1880s saw the revival of the Gothic as a powerful literary form allied to “fin de siècle”, which fictionalized contemporary fears like ethical degeneration and questioned the social structures of the time. Classic works of this Urban Gothic include Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891),

The most famous Gothic villain ever is, Count Dracula, created by Bram Stoker in his novel *Dracula* (1897). Gaston Leroux's serialized novel *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909–1910) is another well-known example of gothic fiction from the early 20th century.

Again, just to exemplify recurring gothic features- the settings in all these narratives are true to expectation; remote, frightening and or vast spaces with suggestions, if not proof of the presence of supernatural elements as well as successfully presenting victimized, vulnerable protagonists of both genders (like Jonathan Harker, Mina and Lucy in *Dracula*).

Post-Victorian Gothic:

Pulp

English 20th-century writers in the gothic tradition include Algernon Blackwood, William Hope Hodgson, M. R. James, Hugh Walpole, and Marjorie Bowen. In America pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales* reprinted classic gothic horror tales from the previous century, by such authors as Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton and printed new stories by modern authors featuring both traditional and new horrors. The most significant of these was H. P. Lovecraft who also wrote a conspectus of the gothic and supernatural horror tradition in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1936) as well as developing a mythos that would influence gothic and contemporary horror well into the 21st century. Lovecraft's protégé, Robert Bloch, contributed to *Weird Tales* and penned *Psycho* (1959), which drew on the classic interests of the genre. From these, the gothic genre gave way to modern horror fiction, regarded by some literary critics as a branch of the gothic although others use the term to cover the entire genre.

Modernist Gothic

In the 20th century, gothic fiction and Modernism influenced each other. This is often most evident in detective fiction, horror fiction, and science fiction, but the influence of the Gothic can also be seen in the high literary modernism of the 20th-century, as well. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, published in 1890, initiates the re-working of older literary forms and myths that become common in the works of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce, among others.

For example in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the living are transformed into ghosts, which points to an Ireland in stasis at the time, but also a history of cycles of trauma from the Great Famine in the 1840s through to the current moment of the text. The way *Ulysses* uses tropes of the Gothic such as ghosts and hauntings while removing the literally supernatural elements of 19th-century Gothic fiction is indicative of the general form of modernist gothic writing in the first half of the 20th-century.

By determining that historical cycles and traumas can be associated with the kinetics of the genre, we face the question; “when/how does gothic surface?” In other words, “when do we have gothic literature”? According to critics such as John Bevan, who suggests that gothic comes about in moments of transition when society is moving from one ideology –or one kind of production- into a different kind. Moments of transition, in this sense would mean ruptures or disjunctions or shifts. All these shifts occurring in the way the society is run in a usual way –so, the norm- would confront contradictions/opposition and said contradictions are then played out in works which are gothic in their tone. To exemplify; moments of transition from the 17th to the 18th century can be pinpointed as such a period. The late 18th to 19th century is another period which was fertile in terms of works produced in a gothic mode. So, we have transitions from medieval to the renaissance where the gothic mode became initially popular and it continues its popularity -with sometimes rising and sometimes declining popularity until today- whereby the mentioned disjunctions in societal changes would/will bring about this specific kind of gothic literary mode. Although in terms of the shift in society, there is also affinity in addition to the afore mentioned opposition. We should not think that gothic is always just in strict opposition to the modern. But rather that that which is gothic in terms of being more medieval/ancient, also has -very paradoxically- an affinity to the modern as well. In other words, the gothic has a love-hate relationship with the modern or the modernity that is coming up. In this sense, the very ancient and the modern aspects of society can be found and they can coexist in a gothic work.

The gothic itself is in some sense, the return of the past. The critics would suggest that the past, the ancient, the antique world returns with a vengeance into the modern of the contemporary world in which the specific literary work is produced/written in. So, there is the past as well as the present in coexistence where the rapture of the past rises onto the surface of the present and this is a very prominent feature of the gothic.

At this point, the idea of the “uncanny” –proposed by Freud – should be addressed once more. He wrote in his essay “The Uncanny” (1919) that it is to be defined as “[...] that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar”. It is that type of “frightening” which leads –in a paradox to the understanding of the term itself – to becoming or getting familiar with that which is unfamiliar at some point. But mainly the uncanny is literally the unfamiliar with which after a certain amount of exposure, one (the reader) gets acquainted with within the literary genre. Not as an emotional preparedness which negates the effect of it but rather as an expectation towards the existence of a possible “uncanny-ness” - since it’s linked to terror, the frightening effect does not decline. In other words, the reader is pulled into the unease of the protagonist –even though the reader himself may be prepared or expecting – the protagonist is NOT! So on the readers’ level, we can talk about “a watered down level” of unease shared with the protagonist as the narrative unfolds. Another way to look at the “uncanny” unfolding in gothic tone is –different from being exposed to the unfamiliar directly – it can also be achieved by turning the familiar upside down or inside out, by breaking through the norm of comfort zone secured by the familiar and making it unfamiliar like the style the gothic applies to settings and atmosphere. This of course, the uncanny-ness, is also extended to antagonistic characters as well as setting; until one encounters the epitome of it in the form of the supernatural being introduced –or at least the possibility of its presence.

A good example would be *Great Expectations* for the uncanny in literature – without the supernatural being brought it. This uncanny is deployed to great effect in this work. The setting of the house, where this house is a home (meaning it is supposed to be familiar and identifiable) but the way it is furnished, the way it is arranged turns the familiar upside down – breaking the norm – since this setting is not the common interiors of a home because it is frozen in time to the particular wedding day of Miss Havisham which did not happen as was planned. Also, said mansion, so the exterior is evidently categorized as a rotting, decaying mansion – as is customary of gothic settings. This in turn disrupts the comfort zone of the protagonist as much as that of the reader by introducing the familiar in an unfamiliar state.

Another motif, common presences are ghosts, hereby leading us towards the introduction of the supernatural or again, at least the possible presence of it (moving us up the scale suggested by Todorov). This begs the question as to the function of such motifs in gothic works; the ghost has a particular demand that it asks of the protagonist or it has a cause to offer to some of the figures in the narrative and as expected from the genre, a ghost is the figure from the past – surfacing in the present. It disrupts, it ruptures the smooth functioning of the present. The ghost of Hamlets father would be a perfect and early example). What the ghost is performing in that particular work – the ghost of the father comes to his son with a specific demand about his murder and being avenged. By being confronted with this supernatural feature, Hamlet – in his stable world – is disrupted; he is shaken from the present and is taken back into a phase of the past. He is motivated to sort it out. This shows hoe the present is ruined, how it is destabilized by requests, demands or the causes of figures from the past. This example again, also serves to emphasize how the past and the present can coexist in gothic works.

To note other examples to this coexistence one may think of things such as typewriters or recording machines etc. which were a novelty in the 2nd half of the 19th century. And these inventions, novelties would coexist in a setting featuring vampires, supernatural beings, destruction and death. One can plainly see how the supernatural and things belonging to the past, the ancient and decay could coexist within the narrative with its contradiction of modernity, reason, science etc. This coexistence of the two contradictory set of beings and objects are featured very prominently in Stokers' *Dracula*.

Lastly, some of the main ideological aspects of the gothic plot can be listed; the gothic plot is more or less obsessed with sexual difference or gender difference and the idea of power. It is highly concerned with the exploration of questions of sexual desire, pleasure, power and pain – bringing us inevitably to the Freudian theories of the “pleasure principle and the inseparable association between desire-sexuality-fear-pain and death with the human psyche. The idea of power, being the umbrella feature encompassing all else such as desire, pleasure and pain. In other words, the enjoyment of power would mean a dominance of all afore listed aspects. This, within the gothic narrative – and its necessity to evoke terror – is enhanced by the erotic, illegitimate or transgressive sexuality, perversion, obsession, voyeurism and sexual violence. It is important to note that these themes are not discussed or explored in mainstream narratives. Even under the influence of Realism, none of these aspects are addressed or approached to the extreme extent featured in gothic literature. Making

use of Lewis' *The Monk* for instance, it is possible to assert that it at times, comes close to pornography. One can see how the mode of this early gothic narrative deals with the marginal and illegitimate affairs of society and how these literary works create a dark space to discuss subjects which are marginalized or laid aside by the mainstream narratives.

Terror vs. Horror (summary)

There are two basic ideas called "terror" and "horror" in relation to the gothic. The works of Ann Radcliff are good examples in which she strives to differentiate between the two terms and define both these qualities. She argues that "terror" is a good thing. Terror could be morally uplifting; it can lift the spirit of the readers. According to her, it has a good function to perform and terror; or the descriptions of terror does not show "horrific" things explicitly but it is ONLY SUGGESTIVE of them. In other words, there is a suggestion of bad things in terror but not a description of it. She further asserts that "terror expands the soul of the reader". That it can broaden the mind and the spirit of the reader simply because it can make them alert to the possibility of things beyond the possibilities of "normal", everyday life and the mundane. It serves to alert the reader's attention towards the presence (or possible presence) of extraordinary thing which are beyond reason and knowledge again functioning in benefit of the reader. This is how "terror" should be understood according to Radcliff and it is starkly different to the idea of "horror".

"Horror", as Radcliff posits, "[...] freezes and nearly annihilates the senses of its readers". In other words, horror is look on in a negative light because it immobilizes the senses of the reader. It shows atrocious things too explicitly and a good example for it could be again *The Monk* by Lewis since there one finds explicit descriptions of various assaults etc. Therefore, this kind of writing, the writing about "horror" is also argued to be morally dangerous to the readers since it brings up a "wrong kind of excitement" in the readers. In this sense, horror is not just the possibility of/or the suggestion of sexual assault but in fact the explicit description of it.

If separated in differentiating terms:

Terror	Horror
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Morally good -Psychological experience of fear -Limitations of human experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Morally bad -Focus on the horrific object -Damaging, limiting to the mind.

Terror is considered to be morally good whilst horror is pegged to be morally bad. In terror we have the psychological experience of fear. There is an experience of fear in the senses; whereas in horror, we have a focus on the horrific subject and/or object. In this sense, the object is given a very close view for the benefit of the readers and that is thought to be damaging both morally and limiting the mind of the reader. It would destabilize the equanimity of the reader; whereas terror offers an understanding for the reader on the limitations of the human experience. The reader is hereby confronted with the fact that there are things beyond human understanding which is indicated by the sort of fear evoked only by terror.

To sum up, the function of the gothic is to cast doubt about the supernatural on the one hand, and then to question or also rationalize certain suggested supernatural aspects. On the other hand the function of the gothic is diverted –paradoxically in the exact opposite direction – where it suggests the presence or the possibility of a world beyond human reason. It also can be utilized to explain certain apparently or alleged supernatural occurrences. This leaves us with two main categories within the genre. The first being –like in *The Monk* – the approach where the supernatural is present, and its presence is reinforced and the latter in which the presence or possibility of the supernatural is destroyed or deconstructed. This is again would forge the basis to how one would move back-and-forth on the scale of “the fantastic designed” by Todorov.

TRANSGRESSION & TABOO

To continue the lecture and finalize the specifics to the topic of “Gothic” and its evolution, it is imperative to understand terms such as “excess” and “transgression” which in terms are only made clear by having a notion as to the difference between the respective terms of “violence” –derived from “violation” & “prohibition” and of “transgression”. For this we will draw upon the explanations made by Georges Bataille in his work *Erotism: Death & Sensuality* (1962)

Bataille posits that, Violence, and death which signifies violence, have a double meaning. On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, since we prefer life; on the other this terrifying element fascinates and profoundly disturbs us. He asserts that the essential aspect of (the humans) recoil in the face of violence is then expressed by taboos which are associated with death. In this sense, death presents a contrast between an unfamiliar region (divine/sublime) and the everyday world (the profane world) "...that the only mode of thought in tune with it was bound to conflict with the mode of thought governed by work" (46). The concept of "work" here is used by Bataille in terms of an/any occupation taken up by man in order to "...cut himself away from violence" (43). Furthermore, be it symbolical or mythical thought, it is deemed to be the only kind appropriate to violence whose essence is to break the bounds of rational thought implicit in work. According to this way of thinking, the violence which by striking at the dead man dislocates the ordered course of things does not cease to be dangerous once the victim is dead. It constitutes a supernatural peril which can be 'caught' from the dead body. Death is a danger for those left behind. If they have to bury the corpse it is less in order to keep it safe than to keep themselves safe from its contagion. The corpse will rot; ... like the newly dead body a symbol of destiny, it is threatening in itself. This statement should be understood in the very simplistic form of the first men and their approach to death as someone animate, suddenly becoming inanimate and starting to decay without any specific perpetrator and/or cause in sight. In other words, Bataille is merely trying to pinpoint the human fascination as well as initially established relation towards death and the birth of taboos related to this natural yet unnatural phenomena. (pp. 46-47)

...Freud ... thought that the taboo generally countered the desire to touch. ... The taboo does not necessarily anticipate the desire; in the presence of a corpse horror is immediate and practically impossible to resist. ... The taboo on murder is a special aspect of the universal taboo on violence. In the eyes of primitive man, violence is always the cause of death. It may have acted through magical means, but someone is always responsible, someone/-thing is always a murderer" (47).

As a rule the community brought into being by work considers itself essentially apart from the violence implied by the death of one on its members. Faced by such a death, the body politic feels that a taboo is in force. But that is only true for the members of the community. Within it the taboo has full force. Without, where strangers are concerned, the taboo is still felt but it can be violated.

Taboos founded on terror are not only there to be obeyed. It is also always a temptation to knock down a barrier; the forbidden action takes on a significance it lacks before fear widens a gap between us and it and thereby invests it with an aura of excitement.

The taboos on which the world of reason is founded are not rational for all that. To begin with, a calm opposite to violence would not suffice to draw a clear line between the two worlds. If the opposition did not itself draw upon violence in some way, if some violent negative emotion did not make violence horrible for everyone, reason alone could not define those shifting limits properly enough. Only unreasoning dread and terror could survive in the teeth of the forces let loose. This is the nature of the taboo which makes a world of calm reason possible but is itself basically a shudder appealing not to reason but to feeling, just as violence is. (Human violence is the result not of a cold calculation but of emotional stages: anger, fear, or desire.) The irrational natures of taboos have to be taken into consideration if we want to understand the indifference to logic that they constantly display. We can go even as far as to the absurd proposition and say: "The taboo is there in order to be violated" or to be more correct, "transgressed".

Often the transgression of a taboo is no less subject to rules than the taboo itself. ... Transgression is complementary to the profane world (non-sacred, un-clean), exceeding its limits but not destroying it. Human society is not only a world of work. Simultaneously –or successively- it is made up of the profane and the sacred which are its two complementary forms. The profane world is the world of taboos. The sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression. It is the world of celebrations, rituals, sovereign rulers and God. In this sense the sacred has simultaneously two contradictory meanings. Whatever is the subject of a prohibition is basically sacred. Prohibitions and transgression initially do not stand out clearly defined and understood. Prohibition is deemed rather traditional when broken the act is defined as "violation" or in other words, as an act of violence. Though in relation to "transgression", the prohibition is rather perceived as "unnatural". In the sense of being regulated by specific laws (be it societal or divine) "transgression" or while the act of transgression -as opposed to (direct) violation- the taboo is suspended, without suppressing it. In other words, in transgression the taboo/prohibition is not broken and it is not violated but rather suspended (in accordance with the law that binds the taboo) where the prohibition itself is "skipped/jumped over while the taboo itself remains in full force. To understand this paradoxical situation it is important to shed light on the relationship between humankind and taboos which have always a sacred/divine background.

The taboo gives a negative definition of the sacred object and inspires us with awe –most commonly on a religious plane. Carried to extremes, that feeling becomes one of devotion and adoration. In example, the gods who incarnate this sacred essence put fear into the hearts of those who reverence them, yet men do reverence them none the less. Men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions.. They are driven away by terror and drawn by the awed fascination -(this being a perfect description of the terror when experiencing the sublime). Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges; the taboo would forbid the transgression but fascination compels it. Taboos and the divine are opposed to each other in one sense only, for the sacred aspect of the taboo is what draws men towards it and transfigures the original interdiction.

(pp. 47-68)