

The feminist undertones gothic literature



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Gothic literature focuses on the darkest aspects of humanity. It was written in response to the change the authors faced in everyday life, as well as the challenges of world events. Gothic literature is a sub genre of the Romantic Movement, a movement focused on honor, integrity, and justice. Physical elements, for instance mysterious setting and atmosphere, along with supernatural elements create tones of high emotion and gloom in gothic literature. Authors like Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe embodied the spirit of this movement through famous works such as *The House of Usher* and *The Scarlet Letter*. These writings helped make gothic literature the influential genre that it is now. Other aspects of gothic literature are the oppressed heroine and the women in distress. Both of these aspects deal with the same thing: female characters. Mary Ellen Snodgrass analyzes the importance of female characters in *Jane Eyre*. She writes from a unique feminist perspective: that the oppressed heroin in the story serves as an outlet to voice concerns about the repression of women in careers, marriage, and treatment. Ultimately, gothic literature is an extension of the romantic era that is merged with horrors tones in order for authors to commentate on current events and social situations like women in society. This can be shown through Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Edgar Allen Poe's *The House of Usher*.

Snodgrass analyzes women's feministic qualities in gothic literature. She mentions an innovative feminist criticism written by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Along with Snodgrass, they analyzed women and their role in gothic literature. Snodgrass, Gilbert, and Gubar focus on the characters of *Jane Eyre* and Bertha Mason Rochester, from the novel *Jane Eyre*. These

characters are considered to be foils of each other. While they are opposites, their situations are similar. Their communities at school, home, and work ostracize both women. Because Bertha is a “ deranged version of Jane” she can be used as a “ means of venting outrage at a repressive society that suppressed the voices of career women”. This proves that because both characters are oppressed and ostracized, they symbolize the need for a positive change and creating equality.

Hawthorne’s character Hester Prynne serves to be a voice for all women while in the gothic boundaries of being an oppressed heroine. As the main character, Prynne gains sympathy from the readers. They see things from her perspective rather than the perspective of the persecuting townspeople. Although shunned by the townspeople, she is able to successfully raise a child and have a career. The idea of a single mother providing for her and family was a difficult idea to comprehend. This is a feminist message because, while she still falls under the oppressed heroine category, she is able to do accomplish tasks that were considered abnormal for women. The gothic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, comments on a social issue in society.

Madeline Usher, from Poe’s *The House of Usher*, is another example of a strong feminist message. Though it may not seem like it, since Madeline is bed ridden for most of the story and does not speak a single word, she puts forward a very forward-minded message. This message being: if women do not speak out they will be buried alive. To clarify, Madeline suffers not only from mental disease but also from the inability to speak out and partake in the same activities that her brother can do. To put it simply, Madeline is an ordinary nineteenth century woman. Poe warns that by not attempting to be <https://assignbuster.com/the-feminist-undertones-gothic-literature/>

more than the label that society places on woman, women's abilities, beliefs, and ideas will be forgotten or buried, just as Madeline was buried. However, the idea that Madeline 'rose from the dead' suggests that this is not a message consisting solely of gloom but of hope. This hope is that women will be able to rise above society's expectations and create equality.

In closing, gothic, a subgenre of romantic literature, incorporates horror tones to show the darkest aspects of humanity and respond to social situations, specifically women's position in society. Along with the critique by Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Usher* show the importance of women characters and how they send the necessary message of the importance of respect for women. Snodgrass's analysis focuses on the novel *Jane Eyre*. A feminist message is highlighted through contrasting characters, known as Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason Rochester. Snodgrass specially notes the outrage that women express to denounce their oppressive society. Another piece of writing that exemplifies the gothic elements is *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne's position in her community allows her to overcome the idea of women's dependence on others through her carrier and ability to raise a child. Lastly, Edgar Allen Poe uses Madeline Usher as a metaphor for women's ideas and beliefs. Usher symbolizes the idea that women are in control of their destiny and that they need to rise from society's small expectations and fulfill their own great ones.

Work Cited:

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