



Escapism through paranormal romance.
How did paranormal romance develop from
gothic fiction?

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Contents -

Contents page

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Chapter 1: Origins of Gothic Fiction

Chapter 2: Paranormal Romance History

Chapter 3: Buffy the 'Feminist' Vampire Slayer

Chapter 4: Society's love for Paranormal Romance

Conclusion

Bibliography

List of Illustrations -

Fig 1. Bordes, D. (2023) *Palais de Tau*. [Photograph] At: <https://museuminsider.co.uk/opportunity/palais-du-tau-2/> (Accessed 24/11/2023).

Fig 2. Screenshot of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Hellfire* (2023) [YouTube, screenshot] At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTFba5gmFuc> (Accessed 24/11/2023).

Fig 3. Screenshot two of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Hellfire* (2023) [YouTube, screenshot] At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTFba5gmFuc> (Accessed 24/11/2023).

Introduction –

Humans have been using literature to escape reality for centuries, whether that be in romance novels so the reader can fantasise about the ideal partner or to excite them with adventures of another world, exploring new and wilder places. However, in 1764, everything changed with the introduction of Horace Walpole's novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) that mixed the horrors of paranormal activity with a romance between protagonists, and since then this genre and developed and adapted to become the subgenre paranormal romance, but how did it get to that point? When does the horror end and the romance start?

In this essay, we will be going over the history of this genre to understand it's development over the centuries while trying to uncover why society enjoyed such literature. In the first chapter, I will go over the origins of Gothic fiction, and how the concept of Gothic developed from a joke that leads to the creation of the original vampire, Dracula. This will look over many works that's helped grow the genre into what it is known now, such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). We then move onto chapter 2, which is about understanding how paranormal stemmed from Gothic fiction and what differentiates it from other literature. Once again looking over historical contributions that forged the path to today's version of paranormal romance. We then move onto looking into a show that boosted in popularity in the late 90's thanks to the independent protagonist and use of paranormal creature, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 – 2003). This chapter will go over the protagonist Buffy, the romance elements involved throughout and try to understand why *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was so enjoyed worldwide. In the final chapter will look over all the research and try to explain reasons as to why society enjoyed the paranormal despite the fear elements that surround it. These reason can vary from the desire to find the perfect partner, to the hopes of a better world that battles misogynistic ideologies and the theory of how humans are the true monsters all along. Finally, we end with the conclusion of the research and answer how paranormal romance developed from gothic fiction.

However, before we start, we need to look into Escapism and its importance in this paper. In the initial research escapism never had a 'one-fits-all' definition and more on how harmful vs healthy it was. When reading Yi-Fu Tuan's *Escapism* (1998) it never concluded in a definition for the topic, but discussed uniqueness in individuals and how that can develop into a sense

of disconnectedness between humans (1998:81) so we looked into the encyclopaedia, and the textbook definition of escapism is: “the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy” (2019). This is important because escapism can come from many forms such as music, tv shows, books etc. and as an avid reader of this genre, I wanted to understand how it has got to the point of sparkling vampires.

Chapter 1 – Origins of Gothic Fiction

Before we investigate the paranormal romance aspect and start discussing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, we should start with looking over the genre that started the fascination of supernatural creatures, Gothic fiction. When considering how to define, Gothic fiction, it can be defined as a whole as an aesthetic of fear and haunting in literature, however, a common definition of Gothic relates to, as Liberty Hardy, one of the many writers of the Audible Blog, puts it, “an architectural style originating from France in the 12th Century” (2022). This regarded to cathedrals, castles, large looming windows, and dark facades, which in turn would be the inspiration for many Gothic settings that would spark the introduction of Gothic literature.



Fig. 1 *Palace of Tau* (1509)

An example of this can be seen above Fig 1. This is the *Palais du Tau*, a palace built in France that was originally created as a cathedral. This image demonstrates how massive these types

of buildings can be, comparing this to the individuals within the image, its intimidatingly tall with the windows filling a large portion of the structure. Each glass window is intricate in its design and the many towers that surround the main cathedral section would definitely fit the “dark facades” that Hardy describes. It’s beautiful in the daylight, but I highly doubt that lighting can be installed in every aspect of such an old building, so the glass structures mixed with moonlight may not be the most inviting atmosphere.

This setting reminds me of Disney’s movie, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) in particular, the song *Hellfire*. This is set inside the home of the Judge Claude Frollo (Fig 2) who lives inside one of the many cathedrals that decorate France. Below are screenshots from this scene that demonstrate my earlier point. In this first image, we get a widespan shot of the room, with the arches on the ceiling leading the viewers eyes towards the massive cross; the looming cross is a reminder to the viewer of Frollo’s power as a judge. Its quickly switched to a quick scroll down the wall from the top of the cross (Fig 3) down to the fireplace. This whole song is a driving force to remind the viewer how small they are in comparison and it’s effective as it pulls back at special moments, demonstrating Frollo in such a wide and empty space.



Fig. 2 Screenshot of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Hellfire* (1996)



Fig. 3 Screenshot two of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame – Hellfire* (1996)

In addition, Gothic alone has been defined as a mood as well; something that Liberty argued “embraces a romantic idealization of death, mixed with high drama and the supernatural”. Fans of this genre love to embrace the darker elements to it, intrigued with the mystery and the unknown that the genre offers. However, Gothic didn’t start out as this expansive genre of horror literature, but as a sophisticated joke. A Gothic novel – at this moment in history – would be defined as a novel that involves the supernatural – or the promise of one – with heavy elements of mystery and antiquity, while it usually takes the protagonist into strange old buildings. Horace Walpole (1717 - 1797) was an English writer who first applied the description of Gothic in his novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) where he used it to mean barbarous or something from the Middle Ages, using the phrase to poke fun. *The Castle of Otranto* tells a tale where a gloomy prince falls in love with a young woman, with the paranormal aspect of this being how the castle comes to life until the villain was defeated. This began the stepping stones to lead the Gothic genre into how we know of it today.

A few decades later, novelists decide to try to rediscover Walpole’s intentions, one of those novelists being Ann Radcliffe with her novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1790) taking place in a castle with a villain and a virgin heroine. Radcliffe’s usual subtitle was ‘A Romance’ and so mixed romance with horror once more. Others in this era used Gothic in their novels as well and during this time, ‘Gothic’ was more about exploring the fear of the supernatural rather

than understanding the supernatural itself. This, while keeping the Gothic concept alive, was unlike its predecessor. The most popular novel that pushed the boundaries of what a Gothic novel could be was Matthew Lewis's, *The Monk* (1796) which involved "a parade of ghosts, demons, and sexually inflamed monks with the ending appearance of Satan" (Mullan, 2014) – this was the first time something of paranormal aspects was introduced.

The next wave of Gothic novels was thanks to Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) which has grown in popularity because of how she contextualised Gothic in a scientific aspect that wasn't considered before. Unlike previous novels, this was the first Gothic novel that had the villain created rather than one existing already. Another writer who commonly exploited this use of reputation in his Gothic novels was Edgar Allan Poe. Poe (1809 - 1849) created short Gothic stories that used many of the standard concepts of Gothic (medieval settings), bringing the horror into Gothic to the max thanks to his fascination with fear as he explored extreme psychological states relating to fear. Moving forward, when considering a modern example of the term Gothic, that's thanks to the most famous, late-Victorian example of Gothic, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) which is considered as the first rendition of the modern vampire. Stoker's novel is filled with all the standard Gothic concepts, "The house is very large and of all periods back... to mediaeval times, for one part is of stone... only a few windows high up and heavily barred with iron. ...is close to an old chapel or church..." (Stoker, 1897:22). Unlike the novels before *Dracula*, Stoker wrote this in the form of journal entries made by various characters caught up in horrific events, giving an outside perspective on the horrors and limited information as people start off clueless.

Chapter 2 – Paranormal Romance History

After looking into Gothic fiction and understanding the history behind it, we move onto defining paranormal romance and how it differs from fantasy fiction. It's important to differentiate between similar genres because it'll assist with later analysis when discussing why paranormal romance has grown into what it is today. Paranormal romance is a subgenre of Gothic fiction, built from a mix of the paranormal horrors and unlikely romance. Deri Ford (2021), a fellow enjoyer of the genre, refers to paranormal creatures as to anything beyond supernatural such as vampires, werewolves, demons, and witches. Paranormal romance novels are notably similar to fantasy fiction, and a common mistake readers make is confusing

paranormal with fantasy due to the magical aspects that overlap; there is a surprising strict series of requirements that that a story must follow to be considered paranormal.

One notable difference between paranormal and fantasy, is that supernatural characters live among humans in a paranormal story, while fantasy is set in their own world, built from the writer's imagination and its own history (a book that transitions through a portal into another world doesn't count either). On the other hand, it can be set in a world such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Twilight*, where only selected individuals know of the existence of the supernatural. In addition, a world that is similar to ours that is well aware of these individuals, allows the writer to create an alternative reality, but still one that's heavily based on the real world; this gives the writer a freer range to develop their own history, based on real history, with the addition of the supernatural involvement. Another differing factor is that a paranormal romance's focus is on the romance itself being the main plot, whereas fantasy is – mostly – action based and not to say it can't contain any romance elements, but that the plot shows more adventure than romance.

After understanding what paranormal romance is, we now can go over some key releases that affected how paranormal romance developed. Starting with the creation of Gothic fiction as previously mentioned, Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) that combined elements of both horror and romance. Audiences loved the mixture of horror and spin of romance as the main characters (mc's) defeated the villain and stopping his supernatural control over the home. The next story to affect this subgenre was Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) for the concept of vampires; people have taken this version of vampire characteristics to overall define how vampires act and abilities they may poses. Unlike past renditions, Dracula is purely described by others and is only discussed by others as they experience him themselves. Their accounts are the only method for the reader to understand Dracula, and with the many different experiences each character has with him, it changes how the reader perceives Dracula. Its noteworthy that Kiersten Fay (2023), a well-known paranormal romance writer, argues that after *Dracula*, "a slew of novels emerged in the mid-Twentieth century, depleting respectability of the romance genre and nearly killing it".

In addition to this, there was *The Ivory Key* (1987) by Rita Clay Estrada, which was one of the first novels to have a paranormal creature as a romantic partner, rather than the involvement of supernatural activity around the mc. In later years, this concept developed onto the big

screen in the form of the tv show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 - 2003) and when it started airing, thoroughly reviving the supernatural and romance genres with the story of a teenage girl learning of the paranormal and how she must kill them to protect her town and ultimately the whole world from evil (this'll be elaborated on later on). The final surge of paranormal romances in this timeline, is one that quickly developed from its novel series to a movie adaptation as each book released was *Twilight* (2005 - 2020) written by Stephanie Meyer. Her story, similar to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* concept, is about a girl stepping into the paranormal world that is hidden from the rest of humanity as she experiences drama unlike any she has ever known. These novels quickly developed into movies from 2008 to 2012, due to the popularity of the novels as they come out. Now that I've gone through the key points of paranormal media, the next section will be looking over, what I consider, to be a massive influence of paranormal media, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* show. In particular, we will be looking into Buffy's character as well as her relationships to understand why Buffy became so popular with audiences.

Chapter 3 – Buffy the 'Feminist' Vampire Slayer

First off, what is the premise of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Buffy is the teen female protagonist, discovers she's 'the chosen one' and must learn to become a slayer to kill the paranormal, growing into her new magic and learning about the new world hidden from humanity. Dawn Shepherd (2004:3), a scholar who wrote about the show and its audience, analyses how Buffy's school life, before her destiny is revealed to her, an "extended metaphor of high school as hell, and many of the themes across its seven seasons deal with the difficulties of growing up, especially growing up girl.", which female audiences of all ages can relate to. Immediately, Buffy is seen to have "normal problems" until Buffy is thrown into this new world; it's quickly established that the most privileged supernatural power that an individual can poses within this society is of the slayer, with them being born with the most potential. When a slayer is called, they possess incredible powers that rivals the creatures they fight (such as becoming physically stronger and developing an increase healing speed) while remaining mortal. This power is significant for Buffy because the impact it has on herself as well as its significance in her relationships (and friendships) down the line. With this power is held by prominently female individuals, it makes the power uniquely feminine. In the first two seasons, she struggles with this new aspect of life, resisting it as she tried to live a normal life, as her efforts

were consistently punished for it, as if it was fighting back, essentially resisting her resistance. She slowly grows into her responsibility but Buffy's relationship with institutional power is more complex as she has to accommodate herself to the institutional forces in her life, specifically to the Watcher's Council who give her missions to complete as a slayer but keeps her resistance nature when she doesn't agree. Buffy's character demonstrates a strong feminist icon with own person with a moral code, and is a visual representation of her show's demographic, teen girls. She possesses a power with ultimate potential and authority, becomes a bad-ass through being a slayer, all while making her relatable with her experiences of school and boy problems.

Leading on with boy problems, Buffy has her share of romances throughout the show which scholars have analysed, in particular, Buffy's romantic relationship to Riley Finn and its issues compared to her other relationships. Riley Finn isn't a paranormal creature, unlike Angel and Spike, and it's been said that their relationship suffered because of this key factor. Riley is unlike Buffy's past lovers, as vampires who could match her physically and understand her destiny as a slayer allowed them to connect better than Riley could ever do, even after he is removed from 'The Initiative'. Riley was destined to not end up with Buffy, from his sudden introduction and fast obsession with her, to his toxic projection of his own insecurities onto Buffy, him forcing himself into Buffy's business as a slayer and losing himself in his obsession with her, as well as other traits. This isn't to say that her other partners were any better when it came to caring for Buffy. One thing the show did get right was how Buffy developed as an individual; Buffy's arc of personal development is only partially tied to her romantic life – allowing her to grow without being dependant on her partner to help / made the decision for her. Nevertheless, this is only prominent after Buffy is more comfortable in her destiny with Buffy's acts of resistance, during those first two seasons, were either focused romantically or forced, removing any real power from them. Ultimately, no matter who you ship with Buffy, her relationships mainly suffered from the ideologies of the time period, pushing the narrative of heteronormative gender roles while advertising the bad-ass, feminist protagonist who doesn't deal with bullshit.

However, Buffy's dynamic as "The Slayer" is shaken when Faith is introduced into the show. Faith can be seen as what Buffy could have become if she fully embraced her destiny as a slayer; Faith enjoys slaying and, like Buffy, is resistant to institutional power but, unlike Buffy, her resistance is not culturally sanctioned (going against the social norm). Faith has a 'got

nothing to lose' attitude and without the same obligations Buffy upholds to, Faith is given a greater opportunity for resistance. This is demonstrated in Faith's interactions with Buffy, with one in particular that Shepherd analyses; Buffy is supposed to collect Faith for a meeting with her watcher, but Faith makes the interaction playful and even a little flirtatious with Buffy, which throws her off and gives Faith the ability to dominate the conversation, despite the difference in authority between them. She doesn't take the interaction as serious as she should, at one point even dwindling Buffy's position as Shepherd points out, "in Faith's words, "all dressed up in big sister's clothes," toying with her power" (2004:31). This sort of behaviour makes sense as, despite her history never being explicitly mentioned, it's clear that Faith may literally have nothing to lose and so drives herself into her work, slaying monsters. This gives her a purpose, like how Riley felt while in the 'The Initiative', and a sense of importance, but "the existence of two slayers at the same time creates tension within their relationship... Buffy and Faith think of themselves as the slayer." (Shepherd, 2004:37) and this is a problem because it pits Faith against Buffy, dividing them further with Buffy working with institutional power as Faith moves farther away from them. Buffy occupies a position of power (Faith is introduced later in the show, after Buffy has had more experience) while Faith's status as outside the organizations control makes her especially resistant to listen to Buffy. The best way to see this difference is when Faith accidentally kills the deputy mayor; this was a line that Buffy wouldn't cross.

This was what divided them the most and is what makes Buffy a better icon compared to Faith. At the beginning of the show, the audience connected with Buffy as the protagonist with the uniquely special power, and with the introduction of another slayer, the series opened up a second, less restricted, character for the audience to identify with. Of course, when meeting Faith, connecting with her seems undesirable with her attitude. As the show progressed, the audience's only understanding of Faith came from Buffy's portrayal of Faith, slowly revealed to viewers. This made the audience make their own personal readings of the character, using what they learn about her, little by little. With this unique supernatural power now split, we can see how different this power can affect someone; as it's quickly established, Buffy sees her destiny as a burden because of how it disrupts her life and her understanding of the world, and as the audience who has watched her journey of this struggle, the audience has been sympathized with her. On the other hand, Faith thinks of it as a gift as we understand her to not have a life of friends, romance, and a stable living and as the audience slowly learn more about her, it gives another character for the audience to relate to who is more on the wild side

and is a lot more resistant to any authority. Overall, the reason Buffy makes a better icon, when compared to Faith, is because Buffy is more structurally sound in her morals and has a position of authority as “The Chosen One”. Buffy has been there with the audience from day one and despite her resistance at the beginning, she will keep to her moral code and is able to construct multiple audiences, meeting the needs of a variety of audiences who enjoy the show, moving from the initial demographic of teenage girls.

How did the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* develop paranormal romance? the difference between this example and the ones prior is that this was a show, instead of reading between the lines in a bookstore, this was more widely available and actively had advertising that books can't necessarily achieve. This allowed a simple switch of the channels, and you could find Buffy as well as word of mouth by its many fans. It brought attention to the genre as well as in a way teach viewer the kind of content one should expect from the genre; an independent heroine, with something that made her unique, a range of drama and love interest mixing in one alternative version of our world. This sort of access was simpler because unless you knew where to look, the average book enjoyer may only know of romance or horror. In addition to this, this inspired other outlets to create similar content such as *Twilight*, going from novels to movie adaptations in less than 3 years after every book.

Chapter 4 – Society's love for Paranormal Romance

For this last chapter, we will be going over a few reasons why paranormal romance has grown in popularity, such as how vampires are being presented as ideal lovers compared to previous renditions of the species, how contemporary readers can express their darker desires without fear of repercussions and as Dominique Lestel concludes, “we are, simply, condemned to loving monsters.” (2012:267). Following from this, in Lestel's study of *Why Are We So Fond of Monsters* (2012) they look over history as they compare theories and tales about monsters to understand why humanity is fascinated with them – similarly to this essay. One of the points they make is that humans love to create these monsters, with examples of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and the myth of the Minotaur; the Queen has an artificial cow made so she may get impregnated by a bull. In both instances, technology is manipulated to achieve a goal and, in turn, making these creatures, so Lestel argues, “As humans, we are not only monsters, but vectors of monstrosity...who produce and generate monsters.” (2012:260).

These creatures that we've become fascinated are human made and can only be how we deem them to be, so it makes sense that we are so fond, because monsters are our own creations and have changed overtime to suit our needs. In the beginning, it was because we enjoyed getting scared by reading about the fictional Gothic horrors, to which it then moved to mix technology and biology to biochemically create these monsters instead of them just existing, and now have the same monsters become the ideal partners to the heroines while turning all that we feared into endearing qualities we wish to experience in real life.

For this reason, paranormal romances have morphed vampires into these perfect partners, but why do readers find them so alluring? To find that answer, I want to share a quote that Ananya Mukherjea mentions a quote, in their study of vampire boyfriends and their appeal, by Jennifer L. McMahon, who theorises that our fatal attraction to vampires is due to, "Aging arouses anxiety not only because it is outside conscious control and yields diminished performance, but also because we idealize youth... the appeal of vampires lies not only in their immortality but also in their eternal youth" (2011:6-7). This is mentioned this because, this idealized youth can be seen anywhere in make-up ads, exercise programs and reality romance shows; people naturally yearn to be attractive and to find their idealized partner, this fact alone is a reason why romance fiction as a genre itself is popular, as it allows readers to play out scenarios they may not experience in reality. This idealization of beauty and youth makes it easy for vampires to be adored because, thanks to their eternal lifespan, they look as old as they did when they were turned – usually late teens / early 20's - combined with their experience as ancient creatures, creates an individual who can represent the physical glory of youth combined with adult accomplishments.

However, as we learned in chapter 1, vampires weren't always depicted like this; vampires were feared for their blood thirst and evil ambitions, but with the boost of paranormal media in the late 1990's, there's been a shift of focus from this vicious nature to their more alluring aspect and tragic backstories. In addition to this, most vampire boyfriends are 'bad boys' who are successful sophisticated men and masculine dominance, always value their first loves above all else, and when the audience is prominently women, it feeds into this concept of loving a good woman can save even an extremely 'bad' man, a.k.a. this common phrase "I can fix him". Ultimately, the reader see vampire's being the ideal because, in most examples, the female protagonists - who readers sympathise with and can relate to on multiple layers - repeatedly choose a vampire boyfriend over a human one; a key example of this is when

comparing Buffy's ex-partner Riley to any of her paranormal lovers. Vampires, and other paranormal creatures, are becoming the ideal for their ability of playing the multi-faceted, constantly evolving, but deeply reliable love interest.

In addition to love interests, many scholars who look into this genre point out the consistent gender dynamic that happens between the leading female protagonist and love interest / male lead; human girlfriends in these paranormal romances seem to want both the approval and security of these ideal men and safely act independently as an empowering feminist. The fact that they still seek approval illuminates a complex and widespread gender role issues of our culture. A common, misogynistic, is that woman should take care of multiple things at ones: cooking, cleaning, children, partner, supporting her family, while being independent and having her own success and life goals she wants to achieve. Despite this, it's still a common expectation world-wide and if a woman find herself playing multiple roles like this, it makes sense to fantasise about a partner who possesses those qualities without losing her feminism mentality, as Mukherjea argued, "crave for an old-fashioned, generally wealthy, and socially dominant gentleman and a fantasy of stable and secure gendered expectations without fundamentally compromising or relinquishing hard-won and necessary, but also sometimes challenging, feminist rights and responsibilities." (2011:1).

Nevertheless, this mindset may scare some readers and confront them to work through the contradictory aspects of the contemporary woman's roles, and desires, so readers use this as a form of a secret escape; Mukherjea stated the same in her study, "The great popularity of this genre suggests that many female readers are seeking certainty and protection and to maximize their options as women without curtailing feminine pleasures, a desire that is definitely worth acknowledging and addressing." (2011:16) as well as, how "a vampire boyfriend's almost ubiquitous dissatisfaction with his own vampire nature might actually represent the dissatisfaction that many heterosexually involved women would like to see their male partners feel about their own gendered dominance and the ways in which they benefit from an unfair, sexist social system; however, the appeal of masculinity is a complicated matter, and benevolent but incontestable male dominance continues to be widely socially approved and desired." (2011:12). In other words, these books provide a safe place in which allows the reader to explore gender role reversals in a way that the reader can still be independent, while able become damsels in distress as a way to fantasize about the more traditionally feminine pleasures without judgement and critic.

In relation to the gender dynamic, another reason why audiences are so fond of monsters are thanks to the relatability of the protagonist to the audience. This task of creating characters that are relatable is always changing every few years as Lee Tobin-McClain looked into how the “romance formulae” changes over time, influenced by trends and changing views of society, “For instance, children were taboo in early romances... when readership among single mothers expanded... the formula changed to accommodate them.” (2000:296). It’s important to mention this because this allows other readers to put themselves into the position of the protagonist; the reader gets to experience the journey of the heroine through the heroine. This is appealing to readers because they know the situation isn’t real and they are in no real danger of paranormal creatures or drama between characters, but this may also give the readers a new kind of viewpoint, even if it evolves the paranormal. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy’s role as the slayer is “transferred” to the audience as they live through Buffy, following her journey from day one and being able to sympathize with her struggles; this also translates through the more *spicey* aspects of any protagonists of this genre. A range of scholars have discussed how audiences of this genre not only want to relate with protagonists, but to live through the protagonist to emulate their power in bad-ass situations, but in their pleasures as well; this sort of entertainment allows the audience to play out this type of behaviour, as Ndalianis discovered, that despite the viewer not actively taking part, we can get highly aroused by what we see. Tobin-McClain’s findings were more on the darker end of the spectrum as, “Forced or coercive sex allowed these readers to vicarious experience pleasure without guilt-because they identified with the heroines who had no choice but to be dominated.” (2000:301). Just like how the romance genre has their own subgenres – mafia, marriage of convenience, forced proximity, academic rivals, etc – not every book goes as far as “forced sex” and it’s the same with paranormal romances. Nevertheless, some authors have been slowly pushing how far they can push their audiences until it gets too much, but this isn’t a new thing. Tobin-McClain even parallel’s this kind of sex as what “...resembles the old “bodice ripper” historical romances, in which macho heroes force themselves on heroines who protest but end up loving it.” (2000:300). In these instances, the reader is able to experience this wilder side of pleasure, feeling the arousal through the heroine, drawing the reader closer to the heroine as the reader goes on the journey with them.

Finally, for this chapter, we will look into the overall reason that people enjoy paranormal romance is the escapism that can be achieved. As mentioned in my introduction, escapism is

the psychological need to achieve relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment in the form of any media, and in turn has a variety of outlets such as music, tv shows, books etc. This is due to the psychological need to escape from reality time to time, and as Tobin-McClain concluded, “[paranormal romances] do not eliminate confusing or disturbing aspects of women's real lives. Instead, they not only incorporate such elements but may encourage psychological work around them... we can guess that romances help us deal with questions and anxieties that go beyond personal” (2000:303). Just like how some people enjoy being scared despite the fear they experience, escapism can be just as healing as it can be damaging, depending on how it's done. The paranormal romance genre takes this one step further by experiencing an alternative, more idealized world while having its main focus on the romance between the protagonist and a range of creatures. In relation to this, one of the major reasons that romance has become so popular – especially with female audiences – is due to the basic understanding that no matter what happens in the story, that it will end with justice served and love prevailing. Unlike these normal romance stories, the paranormal world is different enough, that it keeps the scenarios the protagonist goes through are believable enough for the readers to keep them entertained, but not too realistic; this way the reader can better immerse themselves into the story, leading to more reader satisfaction.

Conclusion –

To summarize what we've gone over, we started with the definition of Gothic, looking at its architectural implications as well as its original definition as a joke to mean something from the Middle Ages. We then started to list key media that adjusted the definition into today's meaning with a few examples being Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). We then deconstructed paranormal romance and differentiate it from similar genres before looking into some key contributors that adjusted the formula into romancing the creatures we were once meant to fear. This leads into my in-depth look into the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, analysing her character, her relationships to those around her and how the audience felt connected to her compared to other characters. We ended our research with looking into reasons why society enjoyed paranormal romances, going over theories such as how humanity created monsters and so love their creation (like *Frankenstein*) and how society has changed the “modern vampire” into the idealized boyfriend, and how it's a way to cope with the misogynistic system that favours men and escape into an idealized world where women get treated better.

How did paranormal romance develop from Gothic fiction? The genre started with the story of romance between two people while battling a paranormal creature (*The Castle of Otranto*) but as time went on, authors took the definition created a new meaning; relating it closer to the darker aspects of horror, firmly cementing the concept of Gothic into the horror genre. Slowly, humans made more stories on creatures with horrific motives, finding an enjoyment out of being scared. This slowly changed as Buffy televised, mixing horror and romance most prominently as Buffy experiences romances with a few paranormal creatures. This raised a world-wide awareness of the growing genre that inspired others to take these originally horrific stories of monsters into the perfect partners. The audience pushed their desires of how they wished society worked and turned it into a better world to escape into by reading or watching a variety of tv shows that followed Buffy's success. This reminds me of Rosemary Jackson's thoughts of paranormal creatures in this aspect – from their book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) – as they stated, "Introduction of supernatural agents... to aid human affairs by restoring justice and moral order reveals a longing for an idealised social order.". This is evident in chapter 4 as we discuss gender roles and how vampires have become the idealized boyfriend by possessing all the qualities of an "alpha man" while still treating their human lovers with the kind of trust audiences don't get to experience on a regular basis. In conclusion, paranormal romance is the newest form of escapism for romance lovers as it mixes the enjoyment humans from the horror as well as the predictable happy ending readers get from reading romance.

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