

Use of Violence in Gothic English Literature
Influences its Popularity

Ph.D. Research Proposal
Submitted for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

KALASALINGAM ACADEMY OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

GUIDE
To be Alloted

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(MA ENGLISH)

Title

Use of violence in Gothic English Literature and its influence on popularity among readers.

Objectives

1. To study the effect of the use of violence on the popularity of the literary works
2. To understand how the psyche of the reader is affected through the projected violence in literature
3. To study the influence of the graphic content of violence in literature on the modern day literary works and its influence on the reading habits of individuals.

Literary References:

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886)

Frankenstein by Mary Shelly (1817)

Dracula by Bram Stoker (1897)

Other Literary Works like Shakespeare's Hamlet, Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Research- Need and Importance of Study

“We need this art of violence to wrench us out of our screen-centered malaise and force us to see the real human violence that surrounds us.”

— *Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster, Stay, Illusion!*

The literature addressed has been important in accomplishing the task of setting the significance and background of the proposed study. Literature is an important medium to look at. Reading is a part of everyday life for many individuals. Studies show that literature contains acts of violence just like every other medium studied, however it has been overlooked for the most part in the aggression research. There have been a number of studies that address the impact that television, film, video games and music have on aggressive cognition but none that address how reading violent literature affects aggressive cognition. The natural progression for each form of media investigated in the past is to first see if the violent medium yields aggressive outcomes. This step has been accomplished for violent literature now. The General Aggression Model would next point to the key mediating variable of cognition. The present study looks to understand how reading violent literature affects aggressive cognition.

Gothic remains a perennial theme but never more so than today. Gothic imagination of writers such as Mary Shelley, Robert Louis Stevenson and Bram Stoker is so vividly visual that it is eminently adaptable into 21st-century media – from cinema to TV to video games. Also it reflects teenage angst – Shelley was just 17 when she wrote *Frankenstein*.

It also reflects deeper contemporary fears of the apocalyptic and the macabre: of bad science and corrupt power. It reflects dark times, too, and offers escapism from austerity or insecurity – a safe, containable way to be scared. Most of all, perhaps, it addresses dark themes of psychosexuality.

Frankenstein is a unique work born of obsession. It feeds on sensational, science-fiction elements to make subtler points about our essential disconnect with nature. It's why Shelley's image of the Creature – pathetic and terrifying – is invoked ever more often in contemporary culture.

Robert Louis Stevenson's classic gothic novella "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" has been adapted many times and it is often a symbol of the horror genre in popular culture. Several stage plays, radio dramas and even comic books were inspired by Stevenson's work.

There are over 123 film versions, as well as a number of parodies for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* which was authored in 1897 and became a famous book after film adaptations. Bram Stoker's 1897 novel 'Dracula' created what is now the most famous antagonist in history. The tale of the character, Jonathan Harker, his fiancée Mina, and Abraham van Helsing, as well as other characters, has become the foundation for innumerable films, video games, books, comics, and more.

The above mentioned topic for research has hardly been touched upon in the mentioned context, making it even more essential as something to be addressed in the contemporary period, especially looking at stylized versions of literature that justify and glamorize violent content to the extent of being awarded bestseller status. This is not considering the effect that it has on modern day literature and its consequences thereof.

Paul MacLean, the American neuroscientist who coined the phrase "limbic system," also advocated a theory known as the triune brain, the basis of Carl Sagan's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "The Dragons of Eden." The triune brain theory states that we are not one person but three separate power centers layered one atop the other by evolution: the brainstem, the limbic system and the cerebrum.

"Reading aggression in literature can influence subsequent aggressive behavior, which tends to be specific to the type of aggression contained in it," a Brigham Young University research team led by Sarah M. Coyne writes in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*. Researchers report that reading literature depicting aggression or violence can impact how those readers respond to provocation. Only in recent years have researchers begun to investigate the impact that reading violent literature can have on individuals. A study exposed individuals to either a violent or nonviolent story or measured aggressive cognitions. No significant effect was found for story type on aggressive cognitions but a gender effect for aggressive behavior was found. In other words, those who read a fictional description of physical violence were more likely to punish an

irritating stranger by making him or her physically uncomfortable. The research also suggests that having a scene in our head can impact our subsequent behavior.

Proposed Methodology

1. Using a questionnaire
2. Open Interview
3. Direct Observation
4. Graphical representation of results
5. Non empirical data (Based on previous research)

Proposed Chapters in the Thesis

1. Chapter 1: Introduction
2. Chapter2: Literature Review
3. Chapter 3: Research MethodPresentation
4. Chapter 4: Result
5. Chapter 5: Discussion
6. References and Appendices

Estimated Time Frame for Completion:

2-3 years

Delimitation

Target audience for present study will be confined to individuals in the age group 14-21

Some Sample References

Frances Burney Thesis:

https://kb.osu.edu/bitstream/handle/1811/49044/1/Gerhart_Thesis_June_2011.pdf

Margaret McAllister

<file:///C:/Users/Administrator/Downloads/AeternumMcAllisterBrienarticleonline.pdf>

Greg Buzwell:

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/duality-in-robert-louis-stevensons-strange-case-of-dr-jekyll-and-mr-hyde>

Elsie Mitchie

<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/michie1.html>