

Twilight: Is it Goth Enough? - An Analysis of the Popular Vampire Fiction Movies and their Relevance to the Gothic Genre

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Abstract: *Why do people watch movies? Something about the characters and the plot is what attracts most moviegoers to prefer certain movies. Some individuals watch movies to escape reality, while some watch them to accept more phenomena into the world of reality. Some people are widely influenced by the characters and they try to adopt certain beliefs and mannerisms. Youth in society are comparatively more impressionable regarding vices, fashion, ideologies, gender expressions, and the like - especially if they receive messages from people important to them. These people may be their peers, family members, significant others, favorite celebrities, relatable characters in the world of fiction, and the like. Despite the role that movies play - we reduce them to mere entertainment. (Iyer, 2023).^[1] This research paper aims to understand the phenomenon of Goth and attempts to examine whether the popular fiction series - The Twilight Saga falls under Gothic articulations? Or is it just a piece of Young Adult Literature with fantastical lands and mystical creatures? For this paper, the researcher has chosen to watch and observe all five movies and examine whether the movie series qualifies to be Goth. It contains several Gothic elements from the outset - Vampires, Werewolves, and Witches. But, is it Goth enough? That is the question.*

Keywords: Film studies, Gothic Literature, Vampire Fiction, Gothic Articulations

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Goth

What do we understand by Goth or Gothic? At first glance, we remember The Goths - a nomadic Germanic people who brought about the fall of the Roman Empire that was ruling over Europe previously. Between the 3rd and 5th century AD, this nomadic group successfully defeated the Romans and brought about the new age of the Medieval era.^[2] Some iterations of this part of history name the goths as the invaders while some take them as heroes that started the medieval era in Europe after dethroning the Roman Empire.

However, to the common man, Goth is an expression. Goth is a form of music that talks about gritty terms, Goth is a fashion statement adorned by dark lipsticks and even darker eye shadows. Goth, however, is also the supernatural and the omens of death that make up most of popular fiction. Goth is the expression of sadness in the most creative possible way. From the macro point of view, Goths are sections of society that are not baptized by 'civilization'.^[3]

The expression of the Goth has invaded and been accepted by almost all forms of literary expression - music, art, film, books, architecture, fashion, and whatnot. In literature and filmmaking, Goth manifests itself as a brooding protagonist, his internal dilemma and longing who is surrounded by the most exotic dark gloomy weather that one can imagine. It embraces the melodramatic narrative and creates an atmosphere of fear and dread.^[4]

1.2 Crowd popular movies of the Gothic genre

It is believed that Gothic literature emerged in 18th century Britain where a certain Horace Walpole in his 1765 story -

"The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story" used the term Goth as an adjective as a subtle inside joke. In his mind, he used the term to denote that the story has barbaric elements that might have been derived from the Middle Ages.^[11] However, most modern references to Gothic literature go back to the era of Edgar Allan Poe and his grim renditions of mental illness and the many challenges that man faces inside his thinking brain. Here are some of the most popular and remembered movie renditions of Gothic literature:^{[5][6]}

Table 1: This table consists of popular movies about the Vampire genre of fiction.

Name of Movie/TV show	Year of release	Director
Rebecca	1940	Alfred Hitchcock
Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles	1994	Neil Jordan
Frankenstein	1994	Kenneth Branagh
Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street	2007	Tim Burton
Bram Stoker's Dracula	1992	Francis Ford Coppola
Nosferatu	1922	F W Murnau
Only Lovers Left Alive	2014	Jim Jarmusch
The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari	1920	Robert Wiene

1.3 Elements of Gothic literature

Many fantastical and mystical creatures are often regarded as Goth and they add a heightened sense of horror to most fictional renditions. But what makes a piece of art truly Goth? Attributed to be originated by Horace Walpole, the Gothic literature contains the following elements:^[7]

- It is set in a haunted castle - The main setting of the story is in a haunted castle that is either haunted or cursed for generations.
- A damsel in distress - A female lead who mainly runs,

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screams, and faints in the movie.

- A mystical atmosphere - The location is supported by unknown darkness and unidentified sounds that add mystery
- Existence of a ghost or a monster - Supernatural or grotesque creatures such as Vampires, Werewolves, Monsters, Spirits, and the like are predominantly present.
- Awful weather - There are always unexplained storms and thunders. The gloomy weather adds to the depressed state of the characters as well.
- Dreams/Nightmares - Vivid and unsettling dreams that occupy the character's minds.
- Brooding male protagonist - The male protagonist is often worried, brooding, and constricted in his mind. Or they are tormented by their pasts.
- Drama and Melodrama - Lots of high-strung emotions, and a heightened sense of drama are present.
- Death - The story often starts with someone's death or is talking about someone's impending death. Death is also used as an omen.
- The beast within - Often, the villain and the protagonist have the same features and same mannerisms and are hidden due to clothes, mental unawareness, class, etc., and a question of who the beast, is.

1.4 The Twilight Saga - A new wave of accepting vampires to be part of everyday life.

The Vampire Fictional Universe is more than a century old and is supported by many folklore and varied belief systems. A vampire in most cultures is a bloodthirsty monster that is an undead version of a human being. The most commonly known and recalled characteristics of vampires are that - they cannot enter the holy ground, they lay in their coffins for most of the day and are active during the night, specifically during twilight, they are repelled by garlic and dead people's blood is toxic to them. They have retractable fangs and they must not enter a house unless invited first by the host. The most common way of killing them seems to be a wooden stake to the heart, however, some fictions show that being exposed to sunlight burns them to death (The Vampire Diaries). In most earlier renditions, vampires were grotesque unlovable creatures that lurked in dark alleyways and castles at night, however, modern vampires are romanticized and sexualized. Modern vampires seem to have a sense of morality and are vegetarian - drink only animal blood (The Twilight Saga). Modern vampires are also divided into good and bad vampires. The Twilight Saga started a new era of accepting vampires into the lives of the common man by introducing a morally aware Edward Cullen, a philanthropist Carlisle Cullen as the good vampires who supposedly know black from white.

The Twilight Saga created a new wave of romanticism the new age teenagers, the 90s babies were overwhelmed by the new tall, brooding Robert Pattinson in his rendition of Edward Cullen, who contrary to popular belief does not want to hurt his female prey but warns her to stay away because, "What if he is a murderer?" The five movies are screen adaptations of Stephanie Meyer's novels by the same name.

Here is a summary of all the movies.

- Twilight (2008): Introduces Bella Swan, an awkward girl who moves from Phoenix, Arizona (sunny place) to Forks, Washington (very gloomy, always raining) and lives with her father, the local sheriff who is separated from his wife. She is stereotypically bad at sports and is silent for most parts of the movie. She meets Edward Cullen and instantly falls in love with him. She is intrigued by his many characteristics and finds out that he is a vampire. They resume dating and she gets into grave danger as a passing vampire group marks her smell and wants to hunt her. She is kidnapped and almost killed but is saved timely by worried Edward.
- New Moon (2009): The character of Jacob Black (a prominent character from the first book itself) is introduced in full length here. Bella turns 18 and is excited to celebrate with her found family of Vampires. However, Edward's youngest brother Jasper, attacks Bella when she bleeds from a paper cut. Expecting an impending doom if this relationship continues, Edward decides to leave town and abandon Bella. Bella is distraught. She spends months on a chair as seasons pass by. The weather gets even more gloomier. Bella is haunted by many nightmares but she however finds solace with Jacob. Bella and Jake become friends and try out various dangerous activities such as cliff jumping and bike riding. Due to the adrenaline surge, Bella sensed Edward's presence - either due to hallucinations or him actually visiting her. She is addicted to this and probes Jacob to help her learn more dangerous sports. Jacob falls in love with Bella. He has an unexplainable hatred towards the vampires - he calls them bloodsuckers. Edward senses every time Bella is nearing death and he assumes that she has killed herself after one such adventure. He decides to surrender himself to the Headquarters of Vampires in Italy. Bella is informed about this by Alice, (Edward's sister) who accidentally meets her when she visits Forks. Bella and Alice run and save Edward. Meanwhile, Jacob has transformed into a werewolf and is learning about pack dynamics.
- Eclipse (2010): The vampire pack that marks Bella in the first movie makes a return. Even though the leader is defeated and killed at the end of the first movie, his teammates and soulmate desire to avenge his death. Victoria, the evil vampire per se, wants to hunt Bella. Bella is on the verge of graduating high school but she is caught between Edward and Jacob as they try to protect her from the evil vampire. Jacob confesses his love for her and is punched in the face. The movie ends with the trio defeating and killing the last remaining people in the pack.
- Breaking Dawn: Part 1 (2011): Bella and Edward are now getting married and are overjoyed. Jacob is distraught but comes to terms with it thinking Bella would be turned before her honeymoon. When he learns that she plans to stay human to experience it, he is horrified. She survives the honeymoon but soon learns that she is pregnant with a vampire child. The child is growing at a very alarming rate and destroys Bella's body. She dies while giving birth and is revived to be a vampire by Edward. He is initially disgusted by the baby but later gives in.
- Breaking Dawn: Part 2 (2012): The werewolves and the

vampire headquarters are all alert with caution as this may cause mayhem. According to legends of their universe, vampire babies that cannot be trained turn out to be monster serial killers and bloodsuckers and that is a problem as it may cause the vampire society to come out of hiding. The werewolves are keen on killing Bella from the last movie as they do not want 'the thing' to be born. However, it is revealed that Jacob has imprinted on Bella's baby and so he is disowned by the pack. War breaks out and the vampires, the werewolves, and the mystical creatures all come together to protect Bella and her daughter. The headquarters is later convinced that this is not a threat, by introducing native American characters to showcase a Vampire Human and how he has been able to control 'his diet'.

All is well towards the end.

According to popular opinion, teenagers either completely loved or completely hated these movies. There was no in-between. Which also means that almost everybody has seen it. However, the genres of these movies are multiple. It is listed under Drama, Mystery, Fantasy, and Romance. The researcher believes that the films have many gothic elements and is attempting to examine whether enough of these elements exist to qualify the movies as belonging to the Gothic genre or not.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Are people influenced by what they see in the movies?

(Glotova, A. O. (2020).^[8] Does Cinema and Movie Characters Influence the Formation of Public Opinion?) - Glotova's study titled "Does Cinema and Movie Characters Influence the Formation of Public Opinion?" (2020) explores the largely unexplored territory of cinema's impact on the viewer's value-semantic sphere, an area significant in modern society. Despite cinema's popularity, its influence on individuals remains inadequately studied from a sociological perspective. The research investigates the cultural identification of society through cinematic art and examines the relationship between viewers and movie characters, drawing from theoretical approaches by both foreign and domestic scholars. The findings suggest that the impressions viewers derive from films can transcend the screen, potentially affecting their real-life experiences and shaping various aspects of their daily reality. This implies that cinematic art might not only impact individuals' perceptions but also contribute to shaping different facets of their everyday lives, indicating a deeper influence beyond mere entertainment.

Lies Van de Vijver (2017).^[9] Lies Van de Vijver's study titled "The cinema is dead, long live the cinema! Understanding the social experience of cinema-going today" (2017) explores contemporary film-watching motivations and experiences. This empirical research involving 472 young participants examines cinema-watching behaviors. It investigates the significance of space over place in the cinema-going public's viewing experiences. The findings reveal that, contrary to changes in cinema venues and film

rental services, the cinema-going activity remains popular. The study underscores how the importance of space, rather than the specific place, influences the cinema-viewing experience, shedding light on why cinema-going endures as a favored social activity despite evolving trends in viewing platforms and theaters.

2.2 Exploring vampire fiction

Łuksza, A. (2015).^[10] In Łuksza's study "Sleeping with a Vampire: Empowerment, submission, and female desire in contemporary vampire fiction" (2015), the research delves into recent vampire narratives in TV and film, focusing on gender relations and female agency. It examines elements like the heroine's role, power dynamics, love triangles, and the portrayal of male characters. These narratives reflect a significant shift in Western sexual politics while addressing associated concerns, employing the concept of "reflexivity." The analysis contributes to debates on female empowerment, post-feminist gender representations in popular culture, sexual subjectivity, and the complexities of post-feminism as "double entanglement." The study emphasizes that changes in contemporary vampire narratives aren't simply new forms of sexism, emphasizing the nuanced nature of these transformations within the context of gender representation and societal shifts.

Schulze, J. (2011).^[11] Schulze's paper, "A 'Truth Like This': Language and the Construction of Power and Knowledge in Vampire Fiction" (2011), explores power, knowledge, and language dynamics in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* through the lens of vampirism discourses. Drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of power, it examines how language shapes power relationships, particularly in gender and sexual contexts within both novels. In *Dracula*, patriarchal norms govern legitimate female sexuality, challenged by vampirism's disruption of these norms, exposing their inconsistencies through desire. Desire, akin to language, signifies difference and deferral. Similarly, *Twilight* depicts restrictions on female sexuality, mediated by Bella's narrative voice and Edward's influence, establishing a power dynamic that renders Bella submissive. However, the narrative also highlights how language and knowledge can reshape power dynamics, offering insights into the interplay between power, knowledge, and language within the framework of vampire fiction.

Kristensen, M. (2010).^[12] Kristensen's thesis, "The literary vampire: from supernatural monster to the actual human?" (2010), investigates the evolution of the vampire figure in literature from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to contemporary representations like the *Twilight* series and *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*. Built on Jules Zanger's theory of the vampire's demythologization, the study explores how the vampire, initially a stark contrast to humans, has transitioned into a more human-like entity, blurring the lines between 'supernatural' and 'human'. The thesis reviews myth concepts, delves into vampire characteristics in myths, and discusses metaphor versus metonymy. Analyzing contemporary vampire literature, it concludes that the modern vampire is more akin to humans, less menacing, and suggestive of self-discovery rather than fear. This shift, however, isn't in the vampire itself but in what the vampire

represents—a pathway for humans to explore their potential. This interpretation portrays the literary vampire as metonymical, symbolizing human potential rather than a distinct supernatural entity.

2.3 What is Gothic literature/Gothic fiction?

Jingxian, S., & Qing, K. (2018).^[13]In their paper, "Manifestation of Gothic Style in Contemporary Films—Taking Edward Scissorhands as an Example" (2018), Jingxian and Qing delve into the evolution of Gothic art and its current significance. They explore how contemporary Gothic art represents a fascination with imperfection and a romanticized struggle, resonating with audiences through its association with darkness, fear, and death. The study focuses on the infusion of Gothic elements into modern films, particularly analyzing characters, plots, scenes, and dialogues. By examining the presence of Gothic style in contemporary cinema, the paper seeks to uncover the underlying Gothic spirit and its relevance in shaping contemporary film theories and fostering innovative filmmaking. The chosen example, Edward Scissorhands, serves as a case study to illustrate the Gothic style's manifestations in contemporary film.

Miall, D. S. (2017).^[14]Miall's piece, "Gothic Fiction," discusses the fascinating surge of Gothic literature during the British Romantic period, a phenomenon still not fully understood. The genre witnessed a remarkable increase in production from the 1790s, with a mere few novels before that time gaining minimal attention. However, from 1800 onward, around 20–30 Gothic titles annually flooded the literary scene. This surge deeply influenced Romantic poets and literary journals. Notably, the Gothic's impact persisted long after its initial surge, extending into the works of renowned authors like Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, the Brontës, and Henry James. The sudden rise of Gothic literature remains an intriguing aspect, marking the beginning of many captivating issues inherent in the study of this genre within the Romantic era.

Hogle, J. E. (2006).^[15]Hogle, in "Theorizing the Gothic," sheds light on the slow emergence of Gothic fiction's serious analytical study, which expanded to include film over time. Throughout the twentieth century, despite the continuous production of Gothic tales across various mediums, scholarly attention to Gothic fiction remained scarce. This lack of attention was partly due to its relegation, dating back to its inception in the late eighteenth century, to the realms of "pulp" literature, creating a bias against it among academics. Additionally, the rise of the "New Criticism" from the 1930s to the mid-1960s further reinforced this bias. This critical mode emphasized a unified literary language, favoring a dense, symbolic, and coherent aesthetic response within clear genres, which marginalized Gothic works as supposedly lacking in literary depth or high artistry.

3. Methodology

This paper aims to study the presence of gothic elements in the Twilight movies. By doing so, the paper aims to

determine whether the movies can be considered gothic media because presently, they are grouped under young adult, fantasy, and romance genres to name a few.

Considering the ten elements of the gothic genre, the following ten elements will be used to determine the analysis of this paper.

- 1) The presence of a haunted castle
- 2) The presence of a damsel in distress
- 3) The presence of a mystical atmosphere
- 4) The presence of a ghost/monster or any supernatural, grotesque creature
- 5) The presence of awful weather
- 6) The presence of unsettling dreams or nightmares
- 7) The presence of a worried, brooding male protagonist
- 8) The presence of high-strung melodrama
- 9) The presence of death or talks of impending death
- 10) The presence of similar beast-like qualities between the villain and the protagonist is only hidden by the choice of clothes and such.

Using these elements, a thorough watching of the movies has been done. During the watching, each of the five movies is individually analyzed for the presence of these above-mentioned elements. This paper is purely number-based as the final data analysis is based on the number of elements present in the movies.

For this study, the researcher has devised the following assumption,

"While the movies may be considered as having gothic elements, for them to be qualified as gothic media or belonging to the gothic genre, they need to be involving all of the ten elements of the gothic genre".

4. Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. What genre does Twilight come under?

The Twilight movies are currently identified as - Romance, Drama, Action, Vampire fiction, Thriller, Mystery, Fantasy, Suspense, and the like and this is discovered by a quick Google search.

4.2 What are the different gothic elements present in The Twilight Saga movies?

Below is a tabulated representation of the presence of gothic elements in all the individual movies of The Twilight Saga. This research paper aims to find the elements present individually and in the overall movies to form a constructive opinion of the level of goth in these movies.

The presence is indicated with a (✓) mark.

Table 2: This table consists of identifiable gothic elements in The Twilight Saga movies.

Gothic element	Twilight (2008)	New Moon (2009)	Eclipse (2010)	Breaking Dawn Part 1 (2011)	Breaking Dawn Part 2 (2012)
Haunted castle	-	-	-	-	-
Damsel in distress	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Mystical atmosphere	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grotesque supernatural creature	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Awful weather	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dreams and Nightmares and visions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brooding male protagonist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
High strung melodrama	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Talks of impending death	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The similarity in beast-like qualities - villain, vs protagonist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.3 Is it Goth enough? - The final verdict

By observing Table 2, it can be inferred that, apart from the haunted castle, all the other elements are scattered throughout the movies.

- All five movies lack the presence of a haunted castle. In the first movie, Edward Cullen, the protagonist even comments about that when he says "What did you expect? Coffins and dungeons and moats?" when Bella Swan looks surprised by their rich modern bungalow.
- The first four movies have the presence of a damsel in distress who gets injured, and needs to be protected, is a beautiful girl who is hunted or attacked by the foreign party, and she forgets to breathe at several moments and is to be reminded to do so.
- All the five movies have mystical atmospheres. The female lead lives near a foggy forest, there is an imaginary line of boundary between the vampire and werewolf population in the city, there is a beach that is off limits to the vampires, and in several of Bella's dreams and nightmares as well as Alice's visions, there are dreamlike landscapes that do seem mystical. Most of all, the blue tint used in the movie makes everything mysterious and mystical.
- All five movies have supernatural beings. Conveniently the vampires are all beautiful ethereal creatures and the werewolves are pictured as majestic creatures to prove a point by the author. The vampires do not look like the classic fanged beasts of yesteryear, instead, they are rich white people with perfect bodies and perfect hair. Some of them have kind human-like eyes too. However, they are very much supernatural. However, ever so often, there are infestations of the 'bad vampires' who like human blood, and these beasts are often described as bears or wolves by people who do not know who they are. The attacks caused by them are deemed as animal attacks. In all five movies, grotesque picturization is avoided to maintain an appeal to the young minds, however, through recalled lore and flashbacks, the wild nature of the beings is often discussed in the movies.
- The first movie starts with Bella narrating that she is not so pleased with the weather. She hails from Phoenix, Arizona which has a hot desert climate accompanied by long harsh summers and short winters. The temperatures are extreme in a day but the overall climate is quite sunny. She is now moving to Forks, Washington which is one of the rainiest towns in the US. The weather is awful most of the time as it pours and is chilly and unbearable to the female lead especially. Considering classic Vampire lore, Forks is an ideal place to dwell especially since Vampires are supposed to burn to death when exposed to the sun. In this movie, however, they shine like diamonds and their 'true nature is exposed'.
- There is no abundance of dreams, nightmares, and visions in this Saga. The first movie starts with Bella narrating about death as the screen plays a fantastical clip of a deer grazing and running around. Throughout the movies, Bella often dreams about death, and growing old without Edward and at one point in the New Moon movie, she is riddled with nightmares as she faces the loss of her soulmate. She dreams about him even when she is awake, it is more a projection than a dream but it is fantastical in nature. The movie's another important character, Alice - Edward's sister has a gift of the vision and most of the plotlines revolve around what she can see and what she cannot see in Bella's and Edward's futures.
- Edward is a classic example of a brooding male protagonist. He is worried about the beast-like nature of his existence. He is worried that he shall harm Bella Swan. Throughout the movie, there are a few instances where he relaxes his face and body and lets out a chuckle or even a smile. His eyebrows are burrowed and he is always on the lookout for potential danger. He is also ashamed of his dark past where he was an active 'bad vampire' who was not as vegetarian as he is now.
- The presence of melodrama is almost center stage as Bella and Edward both are consumed by their emotions most of the time. Music is a great tool used in movies to depict sorrow, danger, mystical atmospheres, love, passion, and everything that a human and a vampire can feel emotionally, in this realm. The good vs evil also takes center stage as there are good and bad vampires, civilized and uncivilized vampires. Not just that, there are vampires vs werewolves. Who is good and who is evil? Lore suggests that these two parties are staunch enemies and have a prey-predator relationship. However, modernized society and Carlisle Cullen's negotiation skills have created a safe space for the good vampires.
- The first movie starts with a dream that Bella has - about death. All the five movies talk about death. Death of the villains, the death of the innocent civilians 'attacked by animals, Bella's impending death if she stays with Edward, and so on. The fourth movie deals with Bella gracing death and coming back as a vampire. All the main vampires - the members of the Cullen family have

interesting backstories where they met death and were saved by each other and converted into vampires.

- The protagonist is extremely troubled with his past as he attacked and killed many people. He truly believes that he is a bad person, a villain. He says “This is the body of a killer, Bella”, and the most iconic “So the lion fell in love with the lamb”, implying that he is a lion - the predator and he inevitably fell in love with the lamb - the prey.

Through these observations, it can be argued that these movies have the full potential to be deemed as a gothic genre but the general public has something else to say.

- One user, Low_Engineering8921 on Reddit exclaims that - "Gothic literature technically defines a period during the 20th century. Books can have gothic elements or be neo-gothic but gothic literature is a specific period in history. Like romantic literature or Victorian literature"^[16]. This implies that Gothic literature is a product of a period and it cannot be used to classify modern literature albeit there is a presence of gothic elements.
- Other users argued that - “I think that’s the reason lol. Although cringe, Twilight is a very successful modern story (so popular!) showing our change of taste in gothic”.^[17]

Conclusion

Through this research paper, the researcher aimed to understand the gothic genre, the history behind it, and its features. Through this paper, the researcher wanted to understand whether The Twilight Saga movies can be considered gothic, or do they just have some gothic elements. Through thoroughly watching the movies, and considering the beat of the online audience and other literature enthusiasts, the researcher has concluded that The Twilight Saga could be considered Gothic literature if the term Gothic literature ever gets re-explained. For now, it cannot be a Gothic media, but the researcher acknowledges that the movies have the potential to become Gothic. However, there is one important observation. The movies are not grotesque or horror enough to be 'Goth enough'.

Therefore, The Twilight Saga movies do not belong to the Gothic Genre according to the assumption made earlier, “While the movies may be considered as having gothic elements, for them to be qualified as gothic media or belonging to the gothic genre, they need to be involving all of the ten elements of the gothic genre”.

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