

A Brief Analysis of Gothic Culture

Jinlin Li

Tianjin Normal University, Tianjin, 300382, China.

Abstract: The Statue of Liberty, Barbie doll, American Gothic, buffalo and nickel, and Uncle Sam are known as the five cultural symbols of the United States. Originally, American Gothic is a 76.2x63.5cm oil painting created by Grant Wood who graduated from Art Institute of Chicago. The painting consists of a house, a farmer and his sister, conveying the author's deep understanding of Gothic art. However, in the late period, American Gothic gradually became a synonym of a thought, and also represented a group of people with common characteristics. This thesis mainly analyzes the definition, cultural connotation, existence value and derivatives of Gothic culture in The United States.

Keywords: Gothic culture; American gothic

1. The Definition of Gothic

The term "Gothic" first appeared in the late period of Renaissance. Gothic has many different meanings in modern English. It is not only a modern literary and artistic term, but also a social and historical term. Gothic can even be used as a specialized academic term in architecture and decorative art design.

As a literary word, it also has a variety of cultural meanings. It can refer to a new phenomenon of literary creation, a new kind of literary works, and a new artistic method of literary creation. Moreover, in different periods and different development stages of literature, the literary connotations of these literary creation phenomena, literary works and literary creation methods are different from each other.

In terms of architectural art, Gothic is also regarded as the architectural style of a specific period. Gothic architecture is a European architectural style which became flourishing between the Roman period and the Renaissance period. It originated in France around 1140. It developed from the building style of the Roman period and was an inheritance of Renaissance architecture.

Gothic churches, were mainly popular in Europe at the medium and end of the Middle Ages, originating in France in the 12th and 13th centuries and lasting until the 16th century. The overall gothic architecture features towering and sharp eaves. Typical gothic buildings are Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Cologne Cathedral, Milan Cathedral and other religious buildings. Gothic buildings fully express the mysterious, tragic and noble ancient artistic thoughts and feelings with its outstanding mural carving skills, and have a great historical and artistic value for other ancient architectural carving arts in later generations.

In terms of painting art, a 76.2x63.5cm oil painting named "American Gothic" was born in the United States in 1930, and had a huge impact on the society. Grant Wood, the painting's creator, graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago and became fascinated with the gothic art in Munich, Germany. In the painting, the man is looking at the front horizontally, and his lips are tightly closed.

The expression in his thin and yellow face is very serious, with his round glasses carefully set on the bridge of his nose. He holds a fork in his muddy hand, symbolizing the unquestionable male authority and power in the patriarchal society of the 19th century. Beside the man stood an unsmiling woman with her lip closed, eyes slightly looking toward the right man.

The woman dressed herself with a typical victorian woman dress, showing the rigorous and obedience of women in that era. The expression in her eyes embodies the "obedience" of woman for man, mapping out the thought and the trend of male supremacy in that era. Culture is an epitome of the historical development of an era. The excellent painting also fully shows the spirits and life style of farmers who worked hard in that prosperous era when the economy was agriculture-dominated.

2. The Cultural Connotation and Existence Value of Modern Gothic

However, gothic is not only a token for the culture and architectural style mentioned above. In modern times, gothic has mainly been developed into a thought and culture trend. It is unfortunate that, in modern society, many young people are at the mercy of a miserable life devoid of joy and feeling of fulfillment.

But gothic "rationalizes" and "personalizes" this kind of depressing life, and gradually develops it into a way of living and entertaining. In other words, pain is my choice of life style--it is also an "art." Everyone is an independent existence in the society. Of course, one can choose his own unique and different living state and mode. Optimism no longer uniformly dominates all people's life, and is also not an inherent survival mode advocated by the public. Pain and depression can also be the theme song of life.

Under the influence of such a thinking model, people can also live their own life in depression state, which is also an unique choice. Life is governed by oneself and determined by oneself. The value of life should also be defined by oneself. As long as you live in your

own way, you can realize your "value". In today's Chinese society, depression culture is popular on the network. A new generation of young people regard depression as a kind of beauty, and also enjoy this type of strange culture, which is also a kind of extension of the gothic culture. Under this kind of culture, one can release his negative emotions freely, and be brave to face them without shame. This is another "active" life.

Just as the word "Byzantine" suggests unnecessary complexity, gothic has become a new adjective. In this dimension, it is necessary to talk about the gothic novel. The gothic short story originated in the late 18th century in Britain, which was created by Horace Walpole, a famous novelist. In his novel named *The Castle of Otranto*, he established the writing model theory of the early classical gothic novel. In the 17th and 18th centuries, gothic horror stories began to become widely popular in Britain, whose contents were mainly about revenge or murder in spooky gothic buildings.

Besides, gothic may still be an effective treatment for human psychosis. If you carefully describe the true story of your last suicide attempt to an upper-class white collar, chances are they will look at you in a strange light and keep away from you. However, the goth doesn't see it in that way. A small cut on your wrist is greeted with a words—"You're handsome!"

It is actually a respect for the other person's past history, as well as their experience. There is more than one way to live a life. It is also meaningful to respect the uniqueness and difference of others. All those who can't adapt to modern society want to find their own place in gothic, where they will get others' respect, and never be laughed at due to their uniqueness and strange character.

3. The Derivative of Gothic Culture

Under the influence of various different gothic cultures, a new group appears—goth. The most typical and dominant personality traits of the Goths are: shy and unsociable. They usually have an interest for traditional arts, such as classical music, photography, painting, etc. In terms of human history, they are really interested in the literature, history and social philosophy of various countries. They dress permanently in black or other dark colors.

Goth usually has pale skin and long black hair. Their eyes often release sadness and desolation. They often dress themselves in a weird and morbid way, so many people stay away from them. However, for these goths, each of them has its own unique melancholy and sadness. And gothic is a way for them to express themselves, is a way of life they pursue, which is a kind of behavior art which could help to express their attitude towards life. Perhaps, due to their indifferent appearance, dark clothes, cold and sad eyes, some people will think that they tend to pursue violence, but the fact is that, they mostly advocate tolerance and peace, hate violence and war.

4. Conclusion

This paper mainly starts from the definition of gothic, analyzes the cultural connotation and architectural connotation of gothic, its modern and contemporary cultural connotation and its existence value, a new ideological trend formed in this process, and a derivative appearing under the influence of this kind of culture—goth.

And the emergence of the goth also gives people a profound enlightenment. People's way of life is not rigid and unique, it should be diverse. People should not be laughed at due to their strangeness and uniqueness. In the world with diverse culture, goths try their best to break people's stereotype thinking mode in their unique ways, create a new kind of unique survival mode and the attitude towards life, and make such people also can have their own unique place in society.

The definition of a noun is not invariable, and it will take on new meanings over time. Just like gothic, it was only a kind of architectural term at first, then was developed into a kind of literary form, and then produced deep cultural meanings, and derived its own derivative. Therefore, people should always treat every problem with a dialectical and developmental perspective, and respect others and things different from themselves at the same time.

References:

- [1] Jianmei Zhang. On the "Gothic Factor" in British and American literature[J]. Contemporary literary world, 2010(2).
- [2] Yongjie Wang. On Frankenstein on Gothic Fiction[J]. Journal of Shenyang Normal University, 2006(6).
- [3] Congying Liu. American Gothic-A Symbol of American Culture[DB/OL]. <http://eflo.enetedu.com/play.asp?vodid=171666&e=1>. 2016.
- [4] Ying Sun. Discuss why the American Goths is a symbol of American culture[J]. Academic Discussion, 2011(11).
- [5] Mingqi Weng, a brief analysis of the five major American cultural symbols[J]. Examination Weekly, 2009(09).