

Adjective Usage and Authorial Style: A Comparative Analysis

In fiction, language does not merely serve as a medium of storytelling; rather, it serves as the medium through which writers build mood, perception, and character into a story. To make the readers able to identify these qualities in their work, authors employ literary devices, among those at their disposal, adjectives and descriptors are significant in bringing their works to life, developing the desired sensations, and conveying tone. Through comparison and analysis of adjectives in three various works of various subgenres, i.e., Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera* (gothic fiction), A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (children's literature), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (horror fiction). Not only will the difference between the subgenres become evident, but so will the role of adjectives in establishing the experience of literature.

To begin with, in Gaston Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera*, the tone of gothic fiction is present in the adjective usage throughout the story. To understand the importance of adjectives in the gothic fiction genre, it must first be understood what exactly gothic fiction is. Gothic novels, defined by Britannica as "Romantic pseudomedieval fiction having a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror. Its heyday was the 1790s, but it underwent frequent revivals in subsequent centuries." ("Gothic Novel").

The mysterious and terrifying nature of this work can be seen in the common adjectives found by the program alone, the adjectives of note being: "dead" written 43 times, "black" written 39 times, "poor" written 45 times, "terrible" written 43 times, and "curious" written 28 times. These adjectives are effortlessly associated with the gothic fiction genre, as even on their own, without the context of the novel, they are capable of painting a dreadful scene. Though obvious, the adjectives "dead" and "terrible" are related to the aspect of gothic literature that is

associated with terror, and the word “curious” is related to the mysterious side of gothic culture. Considering the less obvious, individuals who would require the usage of these adjectives are enough to fill an audience with mystery and dread, which are standards for the gothic fiction genre. For example, the adjective “poor”, though it isn’t as obvious as the others, the word poor can instill the theme of terror and mystery when attributed to an object. The thought of a locket in poor condition is likely to carry more intrigue or dread than that of a standard locket; even the thought of being considered poor is enough to fill some individuals with fear. Another less obvious example, such as the adjective “black,” is also evidence of the gothic fiction subgenre, as the color black is a staple of gothic culture.

Analysis of these adjectives shows that in more downtrodden and mysterious works, the usage of adjectives can easily define the mood for the audience and set the tone without explicitly stating the mood of the story. One may wonder if adjectives hold the same value when attributed to a genre that isn’t meant to inspire as much critical thought. An example of such a genre would be children’s literature.

A strong and well-known example of children’s literature is A. A. Milne’s classic, *Winnie-the-Pooh*. To understand how adjectives are significant identifiers in children’s literature, it must be understood what children’s literature is. Children’s literature is defined by Britannica as “the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books, and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children...” (Fadiman). Meaning that when reading a work categorized as children’s literature, it is expected to be easily understandable, entertaining, and accessible to young readers.

The entertaining and accessible nature of this work can be seen in the common adjectives found by the program alone, the adjectives of note being “happy” written 17 times, “loud” written 12 times, “good” written 45 times, “big” written “17” times, and “long” 31 times. Notice how most of these adjectives are one syllable in length; this fact alone is enough to express how accessible this genre is at its most popular. Also, descriptors such as “good”, “big”, and “long” are words that are often learned from a young age, which is more evidence to support the work being easily accessible and a member of the children’s literature genre. An analysis made purely through the examination of adjectives.

Taking a more in-depth look at these adjectives, it is plain to see another reason that these could inform the audience of the work’s genre. The words “happy” and “loud” are some of the most repeated adjectives in the book and are strong identifiers of the children’s literature genre, as they demonstrate the energy brought about by the experience that the author is aiming for. Also, Milne’s feeling that he needs to include a word identifier for a mood shows that he doesn’t fully trust the audience to grasp the emotions intended for the audience to experience from the literature. This signifies that his intended audience is not of age to be able to comprehend themes beyond the surface level, showcasing the role that adjectives play in the determination of mood and perception of a story.

Through Milne’s work, it is uncomplicated to examine the way that adjectives play a role in genres outside of those that are intended for a more mature audience. Shifting focus to a work that is a stark contrast to that of a children’s book, that of a horror novel, the importance of adjectives will be just as prevalent.

Arguably one of the most influential horror novels of all time, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a strong area of study for the role of adjectives in this medium of literature. Though, as discussed before, to understand how the common adjectives of horror literature are significant, the definition of horror literature must be made clear. Horror literature, defined by Britannica as "a story in which the focus is on creating a feeling of fear. Such tales are of ancient origin and form a substantial part of the body of folk literature. They can feature supernatural elements such as ghosts, witches, or vampires, or they can address more realistic psychological fears." (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica).

The fear-inducing and supernatural nature of this work can be seen in the common adjectives found by the program alone, such adjectives being "human" written 55 times, "miserable" written 63 times, "strange" written 31 times, "dead" written 23 times, and "old" written 50 times.

Though it is obvious to see how words such as "dead", "miserable", and "strange" can be attributed to the horror genre, the words "human" and "old" may need a deeper analysis. The concept of growing old, or aging, is a horrifying concept to many as it marks growing closer to the inevitable force of death. Making the word "old" fit in the context of a horror novel. Also, the word "human" in the context of the *Frankenstein* story will hold more weight than in the context of a different form of literature due to the philosophical nature of the story. *Frankenstein's* creator and the monster are struggling with the consequences of their actions in attempting to play god.

Though this work is capable of expressing the importance of adjectives in context, one may wonder how exactly this form of literature's adjectives differ and compare to those of the gothic literature genre.

Taking a closer look at the adjectives of Gaston Leroux's work in tandem with the work of Mary Shelley's, the difference is minor, but paramount. The adjectives involved in the mysterious work of *Phantom of the Opera*, which weren't mentioned earlier, are those of colors. The work not only utilized black often, but it also utilized (though less often) the colors of red and white as well. It showcases the mysterious and more symbolic nature of the work when compared to that of the horror novel of *Frankenstein*. The adjectives in this instance draw out the more individual aspects of a story, showing how, despite both of them being in a similar genre, the literary device can draw distinctions in how the scenery is imagined.

An interesting comparison stems from the way in which these stories handle character descriptors. *Frankenstein* opted to utilize words like "human", "own," and "dear," while Leroux's work decided to use words like "Dead", "Persian", and "young". This difference is small yet significant as it showcases the philosophical nature of *Frankenstein*, as the subject of humanity is a common philosophical struggle throughout the novel. The play written by Leroux is focused on scene building and assigning attributes to the characters. One opts to paint a picture with the focus on identity, and one uses descriptors to differentiate between a cast of colorful characters. Individuality and struggles with a sense of self, combated with direct information and deeply colored symbolism.

Also, it is important to note that in the most common adjectives used in the story of *Frankenstein*, not a single one of them was one of confusion or mystery. Juxtapose that with the

common usage of “curious” in *Phantom of the Opera*, and it is plain to see where their literary differences lie. Once again, the adjectives show that these stories are different, despite their closeness in genre. One is a story of mystery and intrigue, and the other is one of misery and philosophy.

On the topic of comparison, one must wonder how the adjectives of a work like *Frankenstein* compare to those of Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Though their similarities are few, only lying in common words like “little”, “good”, and “great”, the interesting observations stem from the differences. Even when they are similar, and *Frankenstein* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* use the same words, there is still a drastic difference. For example, they both use the word “many” in their stories, however, *Frankenstein* also uses words like “several,” while *Winnie-the-Pooh* refuses to use more than two syllables for fear of no longer appealing to its target audience. Once again, the levels of maturity that these literary pieces are intended for are drastically different, leading to significant differences in their usage of adjectives. Once again, expressing how adjectives are strong indicators for genre on a broad scale.

It is no surprise that *Winnie-the-Pooh* hosts a more jovial and lighthearted usage of such expressive adjectives, contrasted heavily with *Frankenstein's* usage of “misery” alone. Shelley’s common adjectives also consist of words with up to four syllables, a number that Milne only reached half of to ensure accessibility in his writing. Accessibility is not a worry for Shelley due to the thought-provoking tone of the novel. One is working on inspiring thought and encouraging discussion, and one is working to entertain, and is limited by the audience of the medium. None of the common adjectives in Milne’s story are negative, focusing solely on a feel-good tale for children to enjoy, whilst Shelley works to indulge the audience in a tragedy. This comparison

begs the question of how *Phantom of the Opera* compares to the story of the companionable bear.

Examining the differences between Milne and Leroux's work, one can see that the differences are expected, though still not as simple as one may think. The obvious comparison is seen earlier with that of *Frankenstein*, in which *Winnie-the-Pooh* has a much lighter tone than *The Phantom of the Opera*. Pooh's story is one of funny tales, while the opera is filled with a deadly intrigue. The opera uses the word "dead" a whopping 43 times, something that Winnie-the-Pooh would be unable to implement at all due to being a book targeted toward the development and entertainment of children. Another example of how genres and context of a literary piece may limit the vocabulary of a work is evident in the discrepancy between adjectives. A mature gothic novel will not be able to house the same adjectives as a children's novel, as they both must adhere to the audiences they are trying to attract.

Though some differences may not be detectable at face value. Returning to the opera's usage of color in its symbolism, utilizing the colors black, red, and a contrasting white to enforce its gothic themes. Pooh's tale mentions no colors in its common adjectives, instead describing things as "little" or "big", using simple descriptors to ensure that the audience of children is always in the loop as to what is going on. The lack of coloring or symbolism further expresses the simplicity and accessibility of the story, especially when compared to intricate works. And though different, this is a point of comparison to Shelley and the Leroux's work; they both are not toned down to entertain an audience that is in the introductory stages of literature. Both of these darker-themed works are encouraged to push creative boundaries, as well as generate

thought-provoking discussion. *Frankenstein* does so through the questions of identity and horror, and *Phantom of the Opera* does so through symbolism and enigma.

Through an extensive examination of the common adjectives housed within the works of Leroux, Milne, and Shelley, it is evident that the adjectives used in these stories play a major role in discerning key factors in each story's biology. Be it the common usage of identifiers used in a story like *Frankenstein*, to demonstrate the struggle with a sense of self, isolation, and prejudice. These adjectives demonstrate the horrific themes of such a chilling and thought-provoking story. Contrasted by the way gothic colors and physical attributes are used in *Phantom of the Opera* to paint a picture of the play being told. Doing so while encouraging the mature audience to think critically and forge an interpretation of the meaning behind the enriching colors. Both of which differ heavily from the context of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, whose context is plain to see upon reviewing its adjectives. A gentle, entertaining journey made for children. Utilizing simple wording and lower-level descriptors to adhere to the typical viewer of such a medium. A story made to aid kids in their learning, rather than provoke thought in a developed audience.

Upon comparison of the adjectives commonly implemented in these stories, it is apparent how authors use this literary device to reflect the tone of their stories naturally and seamlessly into their work. Not only do these descriptors aid in an audience's ability to appreciate the work of authors, but fostering the ability to understand why certain adjectives are used will allow for better understanding of literary pieces as a whole. This literary device is a window into the messaging of a story, and comparing these pieces has shown that there is great thought and preparation employed by authors when determining when and which descriptors to use.

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