



# LITERATURE AND ARCHI- TECTURAL DESIGN

The Medium of Story

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If there is one question that can excite both the architect and the writer, it would be where? Whether location determines the layout for a new building or the setting of a plot, the matter of where shapes the way each artistic medium constructs a new form; however, the architect and the writer operate in severely different ways. As such, it is hard for one to imagine the similarities between the architecture and literature, since the former requires a tangible

shape just as the other expresses itself intangibly. That is to say, architecture remains grounded by practicality, while literature's limitations depend only on the range of the writer's imagination. Despite these differences, the two artistic mediums pour into each other in a way that is often overlooked. For instance, literature can shape humanity's perception of architecture, which in turn allows specific structures to evoke powerful emotions.

Literature's influence observed throughout various architectural movements suggests that literary trends have the ability to create connotations about architecture, whether intended or not. Furthermore, literature contains the ability to express the mind's thoughts and ideas, which can manifest into the aesthetic experience of architecture. Past literary trends have managed to inspire a range of architecture, and architecture has influenced literature in a similar way. Thus, future architectural design should consider literature due to its' ability to interact with architecture in a way that enriches both, which further paves the way for ideas expressed in literature to manifest in architecture.

Despite functioning in different realms of thought, architecture and literature both share similarities in providing meaningful experiences to humanity. To behold either artistic work means to comprehend the lifestyle of a person or culture. While architecture must be realistic and grounded by human needs, it also is an aesthetic experience that effectively reflects the community and space it resides in. While literature doesn't take up space in the same way, it also reflects humanity's thoughts and imagination, just without the restraints of practicality. Thus, architecture can be read and inter-

preted in the same way as one might tear apart the meaning of a work of literature. A study that examines the similarities between architecture and literature states it clearest: "Architecture is the expression of materialization in literature, and literature is the account of imagination in architecture." Thus, the two concepts might be far apart, but they are capable of pouring into each other in a manner that enhances both.

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To further understand the dynamic of architecture and literature is to examine the Gothic Revival, a trend in European society that illuminates how these two mediums are woven together. Firstly, one must understand the original purpose of the Gothic

style in order to comprehend the full transformation of this architectural movement. The Gothic design consisted of hugely arched buildings that reached enormous heights, which were meant to trap as much natural light in the space as possible. Hence, this particular style seemed rather fragile. As new technologies developed in medieval society, the need for this design faded away around the 1500s but would return in the 1700s due to literary trends.

Such haunted imagery written about Gothic structures enabled these abandoned buildings to transform in the public imagination as vessels of supernatural terror. This new genre of literature, named Gothic after the buildings, presented these houses as embodiments of isolation, darkness, and the untamed. In a time where romanticism dominated Europe, writers would romanticize the gloominess of these forgotten Gothic buildings in their works. For example, the "House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe is a gothic piece that spends a generous amount of time describing the haunted elements of the Gothic-style household, which feeds the sinister, strange tone of the piece. Thus, Gothic architecture became a setting device meant to enhance horror within literature. In turn, the new literary trend stimulated the Gothic Revival, an architectur-

al movement that lasted throughout the 19th century, even spreading to the United States. As stories about Frankenstein and Dracula inspired the imagination of the public, and as more Gothic inspired buildings emerged, the Gothic style of literature and architecture shaped culture in a profound way.

Additionally, the influence literature has on the perception of architecture continues in modern times as literary phenomena create connotations around architecture. A variety of university tours compare their own libraries to the one described in Harry Potter, evoking that nostalgic, magical sense of wonder readers experienced when reading the books and applying it to their own architecture. Hence, even current literary trends impact the perception of modern architecture. One may even observe science fiction, a genre that imagines futuristic societies, and see how it influences the perception of architecture. These works have the ability to develop cultural ideas that architects must pay attention to in order to create spaces that fit new cultural needs.

Besides providing a look on cultural needs, literature also provides ideas that individual architects can find inspiration from. Transcendentalism, an American thought movement, stimulated the

production of various literary works that continued to inspire the mind of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect that coined the term “organic architecture.” A key writer of the transcendentalist movement was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who contributed an array of works dedicated to this philosophy of possessing

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a deep love for nature, harmony, unity and the individual soul. A follower and reader of his works, Wright dedicated his architectural works to these ideas, which set his work apart from neoclassical architecture, the trend of that time. An example of his work, the Unity Temple, a Unitarian Universalist

church, exhibited a simple style inspired by natural structures. Moreover, he included opaque glass with sunlight filters that glimmer from every direction, as inspired by Emerson’s discussions of the geometry of nature and the sun. Such inspiration by Emerson’s works create a structure that conveys a physical, as well as spiritual unity. Thus, Wright’s deviation from the norm allowed him to explore his own ideas about society and cultivate a new style of architecture. His works illustrate how an architect may develop their own original thoughts through literature and incorporate these beliefs into their work, whether or not it deviates from the current trend.

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