

**The Popular Gothic Novel**  
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**Week – 1**  
**Introduction – Key Gothic Texts**

Hello, and welcome to this exciting new course The Popular Gothic Novel. This is an introductory lecture to the course and in this first lecture I will talk you through some of the key Gothic text and we will gather the attributes that are associated with this Gothic genre.



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Gothic Scare...since 250 years.

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'The mid-18th Century - an era of dark, satanic mills at home and nightmarish social upheaval abroad - saw public taste shift from traditional tales of romance and adventure to an appetite for terror.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/spine-chillers-and-suspense-a-timeline-of-gothic-fiction/zvr9vk7>




Now, the Gothic has been scaring us since the past 250 odd years. The Gothic genre began in the mid-18th century. It was an era of dark, satanic mills at home and the word “home” here is a reference to Great Britain, so the middle of the 18th century saw the emergence of the industrial revolution and that part of British history, though it is quite promising, it also had its dark side with the negative impact of industrial revolution on the common populace.

So, this period is associated with also at a nightmarish social upheaval abroad, that is away from Great Britain, which is here the reference is particularly to France, because there was the French Revolution that was brewing towards the second half of the 18th century. Now the Gothic is seen as and, as a result of this kind of combination of social and historical factors and this period also

saw the shift in public taste, the public reading taste from traditional tales of romance and adventure to an appetite for terror and horror and the supernatural.

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The slide features a title "Gothic Scare...since 250 years" in a serif font, followed by a horizontal line. Below the line, the text reads: "It is a wide-ranging genre which includes *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *Wuthering Heights*." The next line states: "The success of recent novels such as *Twilight* continue its popularity." A URL is provided: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/spine-chillers-and-suspense-a-timeline-of-gothic-fiction/zvr9vk7>. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a stylized figure and the text "NPTEL" below it. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses speaking.

This Gothic genre is wide-ranging. It is quite encompassing. This genre includes *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *Wuthering Heights*. So, I am mentioning a couple of very, very important landmark Gothic novels, *Frankenstein* was written by Mary Shelley, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. In fact, you can see the continuation of the Gothic element in contemporary fiction such as *Twilight*, which also draws on the Gothic motif, and this motif, the Gothic genre has been very, very popular and successful with the reading public.

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## Frankenstein

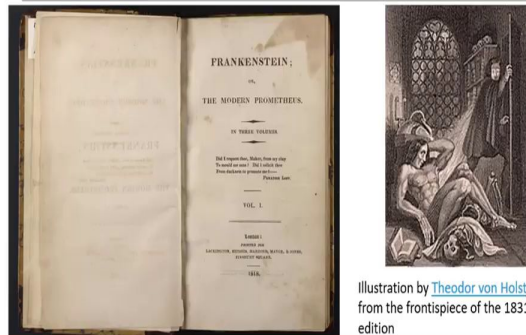


Illustration by [Theodor von Holst](#) from the frontispiece of the 1831 edition



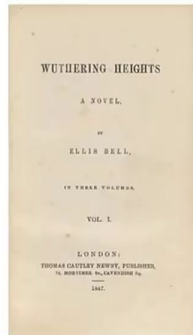
I have here some of the images associated with Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein which was published in 1818. To the left is, to my left is the title page of Frankenstein which has its subtitle *The Modern Prometheus*, and if you look at the title page, you can also see a quotation from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the publication date 1818 is mentioned there on the title page.

But what is missing is the reference to the author of this landmark Gothic novel, the name Mary Shelley is not mentioned in the book on the title page and that in itself is very, very interesting because the idea of uncertainty is an important aspect of Gothic fiction. Uncertainty is a Gothic motif, a Gothic trope and it begins right there on the title page of this fiction. Many people thought that the work was by Percy Shelley, in fact, the most famous person to think that this is a work of Percy Bysshe Shelley is Walter Scott.

In fact, he reviewed the novel as concerning that this work is by Shelley. To the right is an image from 1831, in fact, it is the frontispiece, the first image to the 1831 edition and again you can see how Frankenstein is fleeing from the monster that he has created. So the idea of terror, people fleeing from such ideas of terror and horror is signified in that title page. While we are fleeing from that kind of terror, we cannot help but look at it. So it, this idea of a kind of a macabre fascination with the Gothic is embedded in that image itself.

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## Wuthering Heights



The next title page that I have for you on the slide is *Wuthering Heights*. This was published in 1847, so we have moved from 1818 to 1847 and look at that jump in years, from 1818 to 1847, so *Wuthering Heights* also has the Gothic mode very heavily invested in this 19th century novel and the very interesting element there is once again in relation to the author, but there is a slight shift here. We have the reference to the author here as Ellis Bell and we know by now that Ellis Bell is a pseudonym.

So once again the actual author is not mentioned and there are several social cultural factors for this suppression of facts. Emily Bronte's name is not up here because in those days it was not respectable for women to write, especially not write this kind of fiction which has a particular set of attributes and *Wuthering Heights* is again a dark novel. It has a Byronic hero, a Gothic hero, so more about that when we come to discuss this novel in great detail further on in the course.

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## The Castle of Otranto—The First Gothic Novel



Now, The Castle of Otranto is a very significant novel in the history of the Gothic genre, because it is supposed to be the first Gothic novel. Again there is a similarity with Frankenstein because if you look at the title page closely there is no reference to the author, the author is not mentioned, the detail that we have on the title page is that it is a translation by a gentleman called William Marshal from a Latin text. So again there is an aura of doubt, uncertainty, there is an element of distance associated with this text, so more about Otranto in a minute.

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The Origin

'Waking from a dream in the summer of 1764, Horace Walpole put pen to paper'

'The end result was *The Castle of Otranto* – the first [Gothic novel](#) – published on Christmas Eve of the same year.'

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/gothic-novel-the-castle-of-ottranto-by-horace-walpole-with-a-watercolour-drawing>



Later we come to know that the novel was written by Horace Walpole and this novel was published as we saw on the title page in 1764. How did the novel come about? So what was the inspiration for Walpole? It is mentioned that he woke up from a dream in, one fine day in the summer 1764 and immediately he started to write. He began to put pen to paper and he wrote feverishly at a stretch and the result was *The Castle of Otranto*, the first Gothic novel. And it was published on the eve of Christmas in the same year. The word Gothic also appears in the title page of *The Castle of Otranto*.

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## The Castle of Otranto



Its first edition, published in 1764, claimed to be a translation of a work printed in Naples in 1529 and newly discovered in the library of 'an ancient Catholic family in the north of England'.

<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126941.html>



If you look closely at The Castle of Otranto and its origins, we are further told that it is a translation of a work which was printed in Naples, in the continent in 1529, so it is a tale which belongs not to the contemporary 18th century, but to the 16th century. So once again the idea of distancing is brought into the picture of the context for The Castle of Otranto, so this is not about the here and the now, but it is about the past.

And it is also associated with Catholicism because if you look at that detail on the slide there, it was supposed to have been discovered, the translated work was supposed to have been discovered in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. So that the period in which it was written, 16th century, supposedly written 16th century, its association with the continent, not within the boundaries of Great Britain but outside of it in a strange land as well as in relation to Catholicism, already kind of invests this novel with an element of a suspicion.

So these are some of the factors that are usually kind of associated with a Gothic text that it is foreign, not British, not domestic, not English, it is supposed to have happened in the far away, if far back in time and is associated with Catholic monks and Catholic institutions.

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## The Castle of Otranto



It tells the story of Manfred, the prince of Otranto, who is keen to secure the castle for his descendants in the face of a mysterious curse.

The novel begins with the death of Manfred's son, Conrad, who is crushed to death by an enormous helmet on the morning of his wedding to the beautiful princess Isabella.

Faced with the extinction of his line, Manfred vows to divorce his wife and marry the terrified Isabella himself.

<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126941.html>



So what is The Castle of Otranto about? It is the story of this Prince of Otranto called Manfred, who is keen to, keen to retain the castle for his progeny, for his descendants and heirs and in the face of a mysterious curse, so he has been apparently cursed and he is fighting against the curse by trying to make sure that his property is transferred to his succeeding generation. So the novel begins with a wedding, but the wedding does not happen.

The wedding is supposed to happen between the son of Manfred called Conrad and Isabella. A beautiful princess, called Isabella, but the wedding, as I said does not happen because Conrad meets with an accident and dies; and interestingly that would make sure that the castle does not pass on to the descendants of the Prince of Otranto, so what he does is he decides to marry Isabella himself by divorcing his wife.

So, it is a very, very bizarre plot, things happen pretty quickly and you can at once notice the keenness, the persistence and the evil nature of the central character, the central antagonist who wants to make, who wants to get what he wants at any cost.

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## The Castle of Otranto



'The story revolves around a labyrinthine medieval Italian Castle and its lord, Manfred. It is a tale of mistaken identity, supernatural happenings and tense pursuits, and is Walpole's deliberate attempt to protest against the unimaginative fiction of his day.

'by subtitled it 'a Gothic story' Walpole invented the genre of the same name that still exists today'.

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/gothic-novel-the-castle-of-ottranto-by-horace-walpole-with-a-watercolour-drawing>



So what are some of the interesting attributes of this novel *The Castle of Otranto*, what are its characteristics? It is set around a labyrinthine medieval Italian castle. So what is a labyrinth? A labyrinth is a maze. It is a, it is a confusing passage which is pretty long. So, this castle, this medieval Italian castle is huge, it is confusing with convoluted passages and it is set in that castle, which has Manfred as its lord.

There are elements of mistaken identity, uncertainty about identities or figures, supernatural happenings and tensed pursuits and what critics believe is that that Walpole wrote this novel to react against the unimaginative novels and fiction of his day, so this is Walpole's resistance to the kind of works that were published during his time and age and by giving the subtitle - a Gothic story, Walpole invents, apparently invents the genre of the Gothic, the name Gothic, which kind of continues to this day. It is very popular, it sticks and has been very, very thoroughly popular with the people.

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## The Castle of Otranto

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'The novel was a success all over Europe, and the poet Thomas Gray commented in a letter to Walpole that it made 'some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o' nights.'


<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126941.html>



The novel, as I mentioned was a massive success all over Europe and in Britain, and the poet Thomas Gray apparently commented in a letter to Walpole that it made, I quote, “some of us cry a little and all in general they are afraid to go to bed o’ nights.” So you can see the impact on the people of this novel, so it kind of drew the people in. It made the people empathetic with the characters in the novel and people were also terrified after reading this novel. So it is a very, very powerful generic fiction, it is a powerful genre.

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## 1816 The Vampyre




'On the shores of Lake Geneva, Lord Byron challenges his friends to write a ghost story.

Among them is John Polidori. He writes *The Vampyre*, the first vampire story to be written in English. The novel introduces the Byronic hero to Gothic.

He is the attractive, dangerous outsider, whose struggles with melancholy will feature in numerous classics of the genre.

On publication *The Vampyre* is incorrectly attributed to Byron instead of Polidori, to the annoyance of both writers, but the novel is a success..'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/spine-chillers-and-suspense-a-timeline-of-gothic-fiction/zvr9vk7>



Now, let me come to the 19th century, 1816 is the period at which I would like to kind of stop and reflect about the genre. 1816 is an interesting year because at this year we have a couple of very important British figures, British writers camp on the shores of Lake Geneva, and how do they pass the time? They passed the time by talking about Gothic texts, Gothic fiction, Gothic stories, supernatural stories, ghost stories.

And in fact, it was Lord Byron, the very famous 19th century, early 19th century poet, Lord Byron who challenges his friends to write a ghost story. So who are his friends, who are with him? So we have Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Polidori who is Lord Byron's personal physician, so all these figures are there with Byron and Byron challenges his friends to write a ghost story.


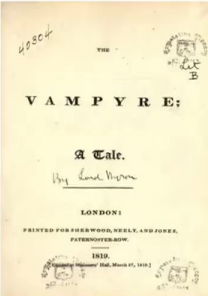
So what does Polidori do? Polidori writes *The Vampyre*, that is the name of the work that he authors and *The Vampyre* is very interesting because it is apparently the first vampire story to be written in English and it offers the readers a very important character, a Byronic hero; it is, Byronic hero is a type, it is a type of character and Polidori kind of gifts the readers this particular type to the Gothic world.

So who exactly is the Byronic hero? The Byronic hero is very attractive, is very potent, he is a character who draws people in, but he is also very, very dangerous and he is an outsider, he is a stranger, he does not belong, he is not part of the whole and this figure struggles with melancholy and these are some of the attributes that we give to the Byronic hero and if you remember a few minutes ago I talked about Wuthering Heights and its dark Byronic hero Heathcliff; and Heathcliff does possess all these features that I just mentioned about this Byronic type.

And so on the publication of *The Vampyre*, ironically this text was attributed to Byron instead of to Polidori to the annoyance of both the writers, but nevertheless the novel was a big success.

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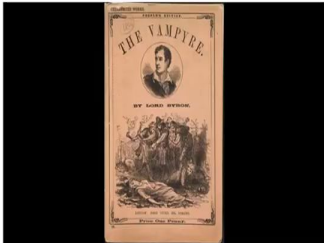

Title Page of *Vampyre*




And this is the title page of *The Vampyre*, so you can see the handwriting on the page and it says by Lord Byron and we know that it was written by Polidori and Byron helped kind of rectify this mistake.

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Title Page (1884)



John Polidori's tale of the vampire, which developed from the 'ghost-story challenge' of June 1816, was credited to [Lord George Byron](#) by the publisher Henry Colburn, in a successful attempt to sell a large number of copies. Byron disclaimed it, and Polidori, the actual author, was able to get a small payment for the work. In this edition of *The Vampyre* we see Byron still credited as the author 75 years later.




This is the title page of *The Vampyre*, this is the 1884 edition, so you can see how 75 years on Byron's name is associated with this novel *The Vampyre*, and the publisher, a Henry Colburn, attempted to sell a lot more copies than it would have sold by using the name of Lord Byron, but Byron disclaimed it, disclaimed authorship of this novel and Polidori, the actual author managed to get some money, a little bit of money for this work.

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1816


Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus



'Lord Byron's competition produces another Gothic classic: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.

Shelley's story features many Gothic spine-tingling elements, including the macabre horror of raising the dead.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/spine-chillers-and-suspense-a-timeline-of-gothic-fiction/zvr9vk7>



Let us go back again to 1816. 1816 saw the publication of Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus, and if you think back to the companions that I made a mention of, we did have Mary Shelley, the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley. So, Mary Shelley has important parents and she also became the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley. So Mary Shelley was one of the companions in that group that stayed on Lake Geneva.

And she took up the challenge that was thrown by, given by Lord Byron and she produced another Gothic classic and that is Frankenstein and this story contains some of very many of Gothic genres spine-tingling elements, elements that would make you kind of shake with fear and most importantly it had this very important idea of raising the dead, bringing the dead back to life and it is full of horror. The idea of bringing the dead back to life is full of horror and she managed to, manages to kind of introduce that subject in front of the reading public for the first time.


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1816  
Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus

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'However, the novel in which a creature created from disparate body parts is brought to life is often considered to be the first in the science fiction genre. Many believe it to be a warning about the dangers of contemporary science.'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/spine-chillers-and-suspense-a-timeline-of-gothic-fiction/zvr9vk7>




Now, what exactly does this idea of bringing the dead back to life involve, it is not a simple act of making somebody dead come back to life, but this creature had to be put together, the new creature which emerged from the dead had to be put together from disparate body parts, from

body parts collected from several dead bodies and it was brought to life and this novel is also considered to be the first in the science fiction genre as well.

So while we kind of contextualize Frankenstein in the context of science fiction, we are also made to be aware of this idea or this caution that science can be dangerous, science can be deadly and those who meddle in science have to be very careful as to how they handle it. So it is a cautionary tale, it is a science fiction genre; it is also a Gothic tale that Mary Shelley brought before the public in 1818. It was published in 1818, but it originated in that summer of 1816.


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Genre

'A genre isn't like a box in which a group of texts all neatly fit and can be safely classified; there is no essence or a single element that belongs to all Gothics. It is more like a *family* of texts or stories.'

John Bowen




Now, how do we understand the genre? A genre is nothing but a type, a kind. So how do we define it? How do we understand it? So a genre is not a box, John Bowen says that, A genre is not a box in which you put a group of texts which look the same. A genre cannot be safely classified, there is no single essence or single element that belongs to all the Gothic text, so what we need to remember is that the Gothic is a family of texts or stories.


So the Gothic element can be littered across similar text and that is why we say, “Oh, this novel has been written in the Gothic mode.” So we sometimes say it has a Gothic subplot and things like that, so it has a Gothic characteristic in terms of its atmosphere, a Gothic has a set of elements or attributes or characteristics which make us define it and classify it.

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Gothic Genre and its Elements



- \* extreme weather and extreme landscapes, like rugged mountains, thick forests, or icy wastes,
- \* omens and ancestral curses,
- \* magic, supernatural manifestations, or the suggestion of the supernatural'



[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_18c/gothic.hnd.pdf](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/gothic.hnd.pdf)




Okay, so what are some of the elements of the Gothic genre? I would like to begin by mentioning extreme weather, extreme weather patterns and extreme landscapes; by extreme I refer to hostile conditions, weather that is hostile, weather that is hostile which will cause real bodily harm to the public, to common people, extreme landscapes, again very uncongenial landscapes, like rugged mountains, thick forest or icy waste.

So we do get icy wastes in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, so the outside elements, be it weather or be it natural scenery, become hostile and oppressive and therein we get a Gothic characteristic. So that is one of the elements of the Gothic genre. Omens and ancestral curses, remember I just spoke about The Castle of Otranto, and how Manfred is cursed and that is an example, so curse can set in motion a series of incidents in a particular narrative.

So the curse here is responsible for the actions of, some of the actions of the prince of Otranto. Then we have magic or supernatural manifestations or the suggestion of the supernatural, so supernatural element, the appearance of spirits is a characteristic of a Gothic genre.




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## Gothic Genre and its Elements

- \* a passion-driven, wilful villain-hero or villain,
- \* a curious heroine with a tendency to faint and a need to be rescued-frequently,
- \* a hero whose true identity is revealed by the end of the novel...
- \* horrifying (or terrifying) events or the threat of such happenings'

[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_18c/gothic.hnd.pdf](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/gothic.hnd.pdf)



Now the Gothic genre has a particular type of villain, the villain can be a hero, villain, or hero-villain; by that kind of combination of words I mean the antagonist, so we have a very passion driven villain, Manfred is a fantastic example, a persistent villain who, a villain who will go to great lengths to achieve what he wants. So the villain-hero would perfectly fit Wuthering Heights' Heathcliff.

He seems to be a hero, but he has elements of the Byronic hero, he has elements of cruelty, he has that fight to him as well, the dark side which makes it difficult for us to kind of classify him. So that inability to perfectly classify certain characters is also part and parcel of this Gothic genre. And we have a curious heroine as one of the important figures of the Gothic novel. A heroine who wants to know, to find out the truth and at the same time she also has the tendency to faint and has to be rescued frequently by a hero whose real identity is revealed at the end of novel and paving the way for the hero and the heroine to marry.

So all these doubtful identities and sudden revelations at the end are part of the narrative of Gothic fiction. And we also have horrifying or terrifying events happening in the Gothic novel or the foreboding that such events will happen to its important character. So these are some of the elements that are found in the Gothic genre, not all of them will be present in every Gothic text,

many of them will be definitely making an appearance, making us kind of define that text as a Gothic text. Thank you for watching, I will continue in the next session.