

THE GOTHIC

Romanticism and Beyond



Gothic?

Negative

- 1775 (Johnson's Dictionary): Goth = a barbarian / barbaric, Germanic, medieval, superstitious, irrational
- Vs classical past / rational present
- Vs order, simplicity, purity, clear rules and boundaries

Positive

- Germanic = Anglosaxon / Native tradition

(⇒prejudice vs Catholicism/Inquisition)

- New evaluation of "wild", "primitive" vs values of industrial and material world
- The old English baron vs cosmopolitan gentry
- Revival of the Gothic vs Augustan literature associated with the new bourgeois world

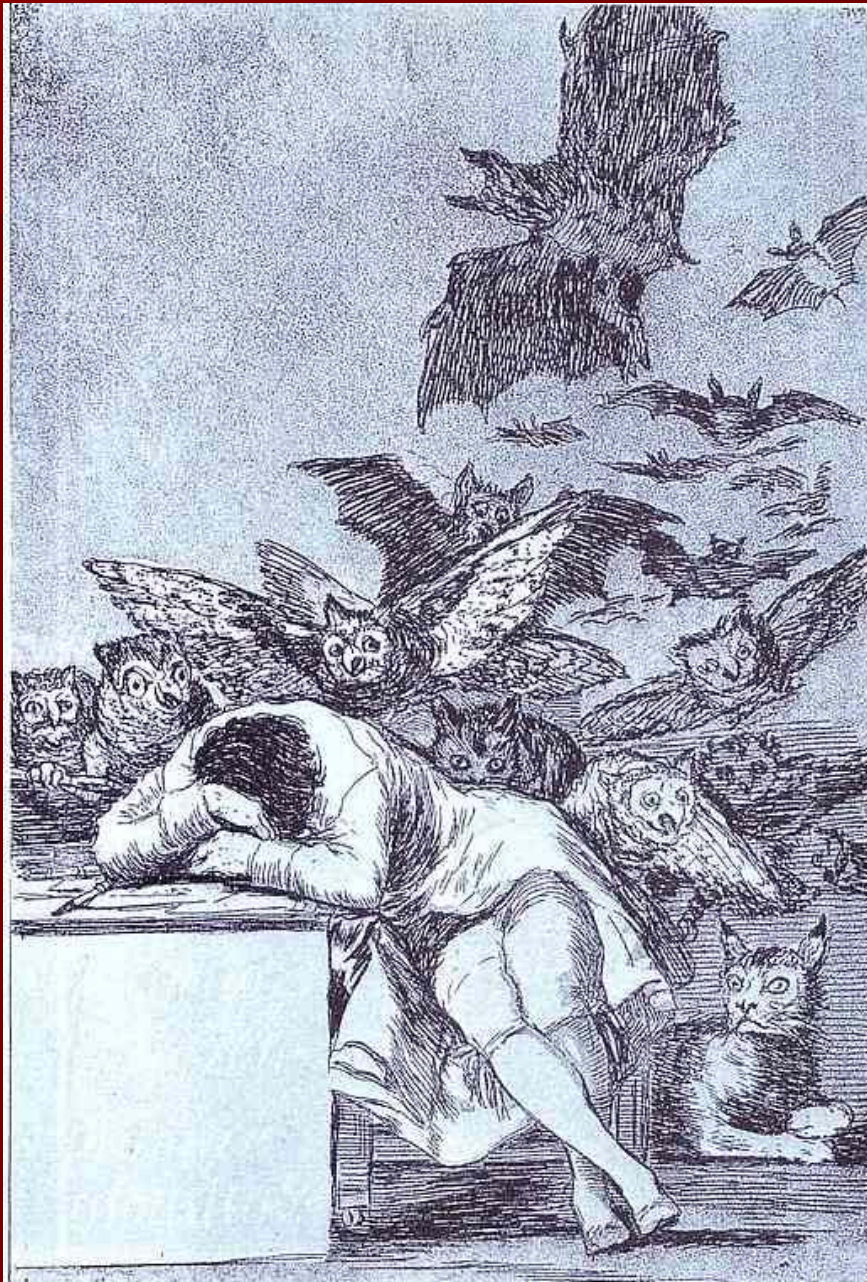
Revival of what?

- Ancient British heritage – e.g. James Macpherson's "translations" of Ossian
- Ballad tradition: *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)
- English medieval poetry (e.g. Chaucer)
- Shakespeare and the Elizabethans

VS Neoclassical tradition

- Graveyard school of poetry
 - ❖ E. Young's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742)
 - ❖ R. Blair's *The Grave* (1743)
 - ❖ T. Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (1751)
- Emotion over reason (e.g. Burke's idea of the sublime, 1757)

F. Goya, *The Sleep of Reason breeds monsters* (1797)



Gothic and Romantic

- 1790s Political meaning: emphasis on tyranny and its effects, on horrific powers of the despot
- Gothic – subconscious: e.g. *Christabel*
- Byronic hero: e.g. *Manfred*

Science, Industry and Gothic

- Reaction to mechanization of society leading to materialism
- Reaction to a science that defies the human and risks destroying it: cf. *Frankenstein*
- Late 19th century: the city as new site of horror
- Evolutionary theories leading to theories of atavism – vs idea of man's superior status
- Emergence of criminal anthropology and mental physiology – cf. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (civilised vs primitive)

Victorian Gothic

- Domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes – horrors located within the reader's world

1) Romantic Gothic villain

2) Unfamiliar space, exotic setting; historical past

1) Criminal, madman or madwoman, scientist

2) Domestic space, urban bourgeois setting; present

- Popularity of the ghost story
- ❖ Supernatural irrupting into the domestic world (proto magic realism)
- ❖ Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant
- "Gothic" = irrational forces of the mind / "terror of the soul"
- ❖ *Wuthering Heights* (1847)
- ❖ *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842)

- *Fin de siècle* Decadence: big revival of Gothic novels
- ❖ Sheridan Le Fanu's short story collection *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) including the vampire tale "Carmilla"
- ❖ R. L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)
- ❖ Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
- ❖ Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)
- ❖ H. James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

Gothic paraphernalia

- 1) A castle with secret passages and rooms, trap doors, dark or hidden staircases (layers over layers//knotty plots)
- 2) Atmosphere of mystery and suspense. Fear of the unknown (e.g. a mystery, disappearance, revenant, werewolf ...)
- 3) Omens, portents, visions

- 4) Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events (e.g. ghosts or inanimate objects coming to life). Sometimes the events are ultimately given a natural explanation ("étrange", uncanny; e.g. Radcliffe), other times they are truly supernatural ("merveilleux", marvellous)
- 5) Exaggerated emotion with characters often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and terror (sentimentalism / romance)


- 6) Women in distress. Female characters often fainting, terrified, screaming, and sobbing
- 7) Persecuted maidens (Pamela-like) threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male (bandit, tyrant, Byronic hero, maniac...)
- 8) Elements of romance
 - Powerful love
 - Unrequited love
 - Tension between true love and father's control

- 9) Metonymies of gloom and horror
- howling wind
 - doors grating on rusty hinges
 - footsteps approaching
 - characters trapped in a room
 - clanking chains
 - thunder and lightning
 - doors suddenly slamming shut
 - sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds
 - ruins of buildings
 - crazed laughter

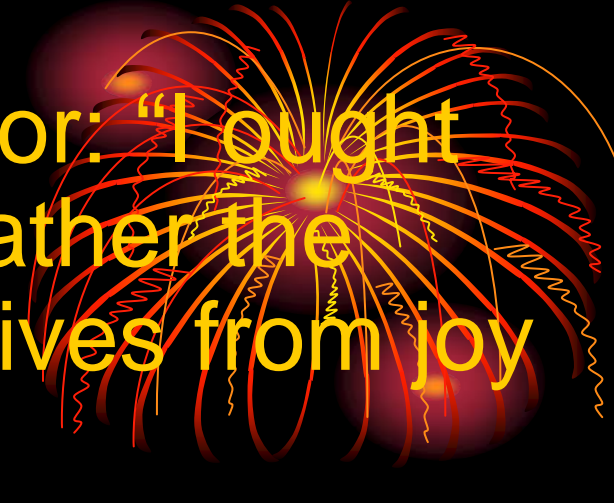
Frankenstein (1818)


- How did Mary Shelley's loss of three children and her preoccupation with the terror of giving birth impact on the novel?
- Frankenstein and his creature embody the Romantic type, totally unlike the hero of the 18th-century novel. Why?
- Shelley saw it as a social novel. Why?
- Is this an unusual Gothic novel?



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- Dr Frankenstein does not conduct his experiment in a dungeon or subterranean but in the attic (top of the house). Possible meanings?
 - What does the motif of the obsessive teller of a tale remind you of?
 - Why did she use this epigraph?


*“Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me” (PL, X)*

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- The monster tells his creator: “I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drives from joy for no misdeed”.Comment.
 - How is the theme of the violated contract between “God” and man dealt with? Who is the Prometheus of this novel? Who’s the overreacher?
 - The novel also stages Rousseau’s notion of natural man (and the child) corrupted by society and embittered by learning. How?

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- Who's at fault? The creature or its creator who, after creating it, abandons it?
 - Victor lies about the monster. Does this mean he becomes his accomplice?
 - Both creator and creature end up in isolation; Victor increasingly feels his "moral ugliness". Are the two connected? (the monster says: "You are my creator, but I am thy master; obey!")
 - What parallels can we draw between them and Jekyll-Hyde or Dorian Gray-picture?

- Exteriorization of moral status and guilt?
- The theme of the double: is the monster Victor's id?
- He is “my own spirit let loose from the grave and forced to destroy all that was dear to me”, Victor says: so did the monster, at a deeper level, kill the people Victor wants him to kill, all rivals for the affection of his parents and for success?



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- Viktor loses his mother; he is obsessed with her, he dreams about her; he has various siblings Any reminder of the author herself? (E.g. Clerval-Claire Clairmont)
 - Viktor creates a female companion for the monster but then refuses to give her life: fear of making her fertile and generate monsters?

- Does the monster die in the end?

- Emotions endure, reason dies?

- The vitality of passion and sentiment surpasses that of intellect and conscience?

- The id overcomes the superego?



So did the monster return?

- ❖ The monster returned : in films, comics, on stage

- ❖ Curiously appropriating his creator's name

