

Year 12 Summer Homework 2019

You will need to purchase and read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams

Task 1: research:

The following activities will require students, either individually or as a group/class exercise, to access the British Library's 'Romantics and Victorians' website which can be found at: <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles>

Activity 1: 'Gothic motifs'. Professor John Bowen Read article, watch video clips, make notes.

Activity 5: 'Aestheticism and decadence'. Carolyn Burdett Read article, watch video clips, make notes

Task 2: literary context:

1. The late 18th century established the Gothic as a distinct genre. Use the internet to research: *Varney the Vampire*, *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk*.
 - Who wrote these novels?
 - When were they published?
 - Where are they set?
 - What plot lines do their authors employ?
 - What types of character do they present? Make notes and give examples.
2. Critics sometimes refer to a 'second wave' of Gothic texts published during the second and third decades of the 19th century. These are often classified as Romantic Gothic. They maintain a stronger focus upon the sufferings of a tormented central character. Often such texts present a more sophisticated treatment of the horrific than is evident in earlier texts such as *The Castle of Otranto*. Find out about texts written during this period by authors such as Charles Maturin and James Hogg. Consider a protagonist from one of these authors and compare their characterisation to those of the texts you are studying.
3. Look up plot summaries of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey*. What attitudes and insights do these novels reveal about:
 - a. the Gothic as a genre?
 - b. the readers of Gothic novels?
 - c. Do you think that Austen and Peacock saw the Gothic as a 'serious' genre?
 - d. How would you describe the novels named above? Are they imitations, parodies or pastiches? Explain your response.
4. Victorian Gothic: writers in this period often adopt the Gothic genre as a means to explore taboo subjects forbidden by 'Victorian' morality. Their texts explore the dark recesses of Victorian society and the private desires, perversions and degeneration that lurk behind the façade of respectability. Research Edgar Allan Poe and R.L. Stevenson. What taboo subjects do they tackle?
5. Fin de siècle Gothic (published at the close of the 19th and opening of the 20th centuries): during this period fears were raised about changes in society and a perceived decline in morality. Fin de siècle texts tend to focus upon moral decadence and often hint at impending catastrophe. No longer set amongst architectural ruins, fin de siècle Gothic narratives substitute the human mind and body for the physical landscape of earlier Gothic texts. The mind and body with its potential to change, mutate, corrupt and decay features in the work of R.L. Stevenson, Arthur Machen,

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and H.G. Wells. Research these authors and consider how their handling of Gothic motifs compares to more traditional Gothic texts.

6. In the 20th century various forms of popular fiction adopted the forms and methods of the Gothic (e.g. horror, ghost stories and historical romances or 'bodice-rippers' as they were commonly known). Fiction considered to be more 'literary' also drew upon Gothic motifs even though it was not strictly regarded as Gothic. Research authors such as John Fowles, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark and consider how their use of Gothic tropes compares to more traditional Gothic texts.

Task 2: The Castle of Otranto

The following extract is taken from Horace Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), largely considered to be the original gothic text. Read through carefully and answer the questions at the end of the extract.

Manfred, prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: the latter, a most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda. Conrad, the son, was three years younger, a homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition; yet he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda. Manfred had contracted a marriage for his son with the Marquis of Vincenza's daughter, Isabella; and she had already been delivered by her guardians into the hands of Manfred, that he might celebrate the wedding as soon as Conrad's infirm state of health would permit. Manfred's impatience for this ceremonial was remarked by his family and neighbours. The former, indeed, apprehending the severity of their prince's disposition, did not dare to utter their surmises on his precipitation. Hippolita, his wife, an amiable lady, did sometimes venture to represent the danger of marrying their only son so early, considering his great youth, and greater infirmities; but she never received any other answer than reflections on her own sterility, who had given him but one heir. His tenants and subjects were less cautious in their discourses: they attributed this hasty wedding to the prince's dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced, That the castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it. It was difficult to make any sense of this prophesy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question. Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion.

Young Conrad's birth-day was fixed for his espousals. The company was assembled in the chapel of the castle, and everything ready for beginning of the divine office, when Conrad himself was missing. Manfred, impatient of the least delay, and who had not observed his son retire, dispatched one of his attendants to summon the young prince. The servant, who had not staid long enough to have crossed to Conrad's apartment, came running back breathless, in a frantic manner, his eyes staring, and foaming at the mouth. He said nothing, but pointed to the court. The company was struck with terror and amazement. The princess Hippolita, without knowing what was the matter, but anxious for her son, swooned away. Manfred, less apprehensive than enraged at the procrastination of the nuptials, and at the folly of his domestic, asked imperiously, what was the matter? The fellow made no answer, but continued pointing towards the courtyard; and, at last, after repeated questions put to him, cried out, Oh the helmet! the helmet! In the mean time some of the company had run into the court, from whence was heard a confused noise of shrieks, horror, and surprise. Manfred, who began to be alarmed at not seeing his son, went himself to get information of what occasioned this strange confusion, Matilda remained endeavouring to assist her mother, and Isabella staid for the same purpose, and to avoid showing any impatience for the bridegroom, for whom, in truth, she had conceived little affection.

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The first thing that struck Manfred's eyes was a group of his servants endeavouring to raise something that appeared to him a mountain of sable plumes. He gazed without believing his sight. What are ye doing? cried Manfred wrathfully: Where is my son? A volley of voices replied, Oh my Lord! the prince! the prince! the helmet! the helmet! Shocked with these lamentable sounds, and dreading he knew not what, he advanced hastily – But what a sight for a father's eyes! – He beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers.

Questions: The Castle of Otranto

1. Using your learning from the previous activity, identify any gothic motifs apparent here in the extract.
2. Think carefully about Walpole's characterisation of Manfred at the opening of the novel:
 - a. What is his status?
 - b. What is his main motivation?
 - c. What is Manfred's primary characteristic as Walpole presents him here?
 - d. In characterising Manfred does Walpole draw upon any stereotypes that you recognise?
3. Think about the way society was structured at the time the novel was set: what were the priorities of wealthy, aristocratic fathers? How do you think the original readership would have responded to Manfred's excessive affection for the 'sickly' Conrad and his disregard of his 'beautiful' daughter Matilda?
4. Look carefully at the language used to characterise Matilda. What response does this evoke in the reader (e.g. pity, contempt, a sense of her innocence and/or vulnerability)? What is the effect of this characterisation upon the reader?
5. Look at the ways in which the genders are presented in this extract. Are they sharply differentiated? Can you think of any other genre that presents gender in similar ways to Walpole?
6. Is the prophecy (That the castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it) comprehensible?
 - a. What response does the prophecy evoke in readers (confusion, bewilderment, incredulity)?
 - b. How does the prophecy add to the narrative (does it clarify, complicate or leave readers in a state of incomprehension)?
 - c. What does this tell you about the Gothic?
7. What is your response to the device of the giant 'helmet' as the cause of Conrad's death? • Is this a realistic or credible device? What does this suggest about Gothic plots?
8. Do you recognise any narrative correspondences or can you make any connections between this early Gothic text and the novels you are/ have studying/ed?