The Villains of Romantic Gothic

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Module Description:

This module focuses on the antagonists and anti-heroes of Romantic-period Gothic writing, asking what they can tell us about the anxieties and obsessions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We will encounter narratives of usurpation, of political disorder, and of gendered, racial, and class-based transgression. The module will introduce you to specific Gothic figures: the first vampires in English literature; the troubled Byronic hero; the double; outcasts like the ‘wandering Jew’. We will explore the dark attraction of destructive passions while also probing how and why certain impulses were ‘othered’. Throughout the module, we will relate the fears and attractions of the Gothic mode to contemporary political upheavals and to wider dynamics of national identity, gender, race, and class.

The majority of our reading will be Gothic fiction, but the module will also cover poetry, drama, and non-fictional prose. The range of texts will ensure that we can challenge traditional distinctions between ‘Romanticism’ and ‘the Gothic’, as well as between ‘male’ and ‘female’ Gothic writing. Covering the period between 1764 (the publication date of Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto) and 1824 (when James Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner appeared), we will examine the groundbreaking work of Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, and Joanna Baillie, among others. The module will trace how the villains of early Gothic writing were shaped into the archetypal figures that we know today.
Module Outline:

Week 2: Usurpers
Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)

Week 3: Masters and Mobs
Extracts from: Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790); Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790); Hannah More, *Village Politics* (1792); William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (1794)

Week 4: Monks and Matriarchs
Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (1797)

Week 5: Vampires
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Christabel’ (1816; written c.1797-1800) and John Polidori, *The Vampyre* (1819)

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: Sex, Race, and the Devil
Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya* (1806)

Week 8: Anti-Heroes
Joanna Baillie, *De Monfort* (1798) and Lord Byron, *Manfred* (1817)

Week 9: Outcasts
Extracts from: Percy Shelley, *The Wandering Jew* (written 1810); Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818); Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820)

Week 10: Doubles and Damnation
James Hogg, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)

Texts to Purchase:


All other core texts will be made available electronically via the module VLE site.

Reading Lists

Full reading lists, with recommended critical reading for each week, will be available on the module’s VLE site. Preliminary suggestions for general reading about the period’s Gothic writing are below.
General Critical Reading on the Gothic:

Fred Botting, *Gothic* (Routledge, 1996)


Davison, Carol Margaret, *Gothic Literature 1764 – 1824* (University of Wales Press, 2009)

Malchow, Howard L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford UP, 1996)

Markman Ellis *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh UP, 2000)

Max Fincher, *Queering Gothic in the Romantic Age* (Palgrave, 2007)


Ellen Ledoux, ‘Was there ever a “Female Gothic”?’ *Palgrave Communications* 3, article no. 17042 (2017)


James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic* (Cambridge UP, 1999)

Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge UP, 2013)