Hobgoblin romances and shilling shockers: The rise of the literary Gothic, 1750-1830

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Hilary Term 2017

Option content and learning aims:

Haunted castles, resurrected bodies, murderous monks, blood-thirsty vampires, and preyed-upon heroines – these are some of the things we expect from a text advertising itself as ‘Gothic’. But, what does ‘Gothic’ really mean?

This course introduces students to the emergence and development of a recognizable Gothic aesthetic. It considers the characteristic preoccupations of the Gothic novel, while also challenging these stereotypes and engaging with satire. In addition to the novel, the course also considers a variety of other genres including poetry, chapbooks, short fiction, non-fiction prose, and drama, as well as engaging with Gothic illustration and images.

Gothic literature is addressed in relation to the events of the period, including the Gordon Riots, the 1798 rebellion, and the French Revolution. Gender also plays a vital part in the course in relation to both authorship and readership, while the negotiation of identity is also assessed, particularly in relation to the development of Irish Gothic.

Schedule:

Week 1  Introduction: What is the Gothic?
Week 2  Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry (part II) & Aikin fragment
Week 3  Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto
Week 4  Gothic Verse (reading material to be provided)
Week 5  Ann Radcliffe, A Sicilian Romance
Week 6  Mary Wollstonecraft, The Wrongs of Woman
Week 7  STUDY WEEK
Week 8  Charles Maturin, Bertram; or the Castle of St. Aldobrand
Week 9  Gothic chapbooks/short fiction (reading material to be provided)
Week 10  James Hogg, Private Memoirs & Confessions of A Justified Sinner
Week 11  Easter
Week 12  Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey
Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

1. Discuss the social and historical background from which the Gothic aesthetic emerged in the long eighteenth century.
2. Define key concepts that underpin a full understanding of the literary Gothic.
3. Analyse critically the set texts while also relating them to each other and their social, cultural, and political contexts.
4. Appreciate and engage in existing debate over the definition and meaning of ‘the Gothic’ in the long eighteenth century.

Assessment Details:

This module will be assessed by a combination of a research exercise (25%) and an essay (75%). The research exercise will consist of an annotated bibliography, while the essay topic can be of the student’s own choice, reached upon consultation with the module convenor.