

**Topic: Gothic Mode**

**Course Title: *Frankenstein***

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## **Gothic novels and *Frankenstein***

Gothic novels are noted for their terror and mystery elements. This genre gained immense popularity in England in the 1790s and was presumably part of popular culture.

The European Gothic novels are highly imaginative and were inspired by Mediaeval Gothic architecture. Gothic art and architecture evolved from Romanesque art that flourished in phases in Mediaeval Europe.

The Gothic novelists were inspired by the Mediaeval Gothic architecture that consisted of gloomy castles, ruins, haunted houses, and monasteries. And these buildings had to have hidden and subterranean passages, hidden panels, trap doors where sunlight seldom penetrated. So, it is evident that this extremely

imaginative genre played on or exploited human fear, human predilection for sensational romance and violence. The most notable novelists who popularized Gothic novels in England are: Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Gregory Lewis and William Beckford.

The key elements in a Gothic novel are:

- Predominance of darkness, storms, moonlight
- Ghosts,
- Romance (with disastrous consequences)
- Family curses, prophecies, mishaps
- Supernatural events, unexplained mysteries
- Disease, decay and madness.

*Frankenstein*

If we look at Mary Shelley's novel, we can note several elements of the **Gothic** inherent. But one must not forget that *Frankenstein* is much more than a conventional Gothic novel. It is not merely a story of horror and sensation.

- The **setting**: Beginning with the unpredictable and often hostile seas to the dimly lit, desolate laboratories of Ingolstadt; from graveyards to charnel houses, the novel dwells on **darkness and gloom**.
- **Weather/ ambience**: The general absence of the warmth of sunshine and the abundance of gloomy moonlit nights is also the perfect backdrop for the **Gothic** in the novel.
- **Disease, Decay and Death**: No, the novel is not set in the times of a pandemic but disease dominates the narrative on multiple levels.

Elizabeth contracts and recovers from scarlet fever but Victor's mother dies after a spell of illness.

Decay and death drives the narrative, beginning with the Creature's attempts to wipe out the De Laceys as the **relationship decays**. William, Justine, Elizabeth die, one after another. Finally, Victor Frankenstein dies and we are not sure of the Creature's fate. In all probability, the Creature will perish because he has no purpose without his creator.

- **Mystery/ Suspense:** The ultimate mystery of *Frankenstein* is the unknown truth of Victor's scientific experiments. Everything about his work is shrouded in mystery, almost as a parallel to God's creation. The withholding of details is Shelley's strategy to maintain the tempo of suspense.
- **The Monster/ Creature:** The horrific Creature that is literally constructed out of

putrid flesh and maggot infested skin generates revulsion and terror in the novel. The journey of Victor's creature from innocence to experience, where he finally acquires/adopts mankind's deceitful nature and begins to lie, is frightening. The evil that lurks terrifies Victor and the readers alike. He is wily and watchful, and is on a murderous journey.