FORM - GOTHIC CONVENTIONS: FRANKENSTEIN 2022

notes taken from *various sources*

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GOTHIC: A COLLECTION OF SUBGENRES

one might want to think of Gothic, especially in its more modern manifestations, in terms of a collection of subgenres:
- the ghost story,
- the horror story,
- the 'techno-Gothic'

COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS

Gothic conventions emerged through a long and complex literary and philosophical evolution.
- The ornate elements that invest Gothic literature with its unique energy flourished during the Romantic era and continue to colour fiction and film today
  - The range includes
    - Chivalry
    - Piety
    - Mystery
    - Vendettas
    - medieval magic
    - the grotesque
    - deformity
    - illusion
    - terror
    - monsters
      - the monstrous potential of science and technology
    - repression
    - sensationalism
    - perversity
    - dissipation
    - degeneration
    - good and evil
    - decay
    - neglect

COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS: VENDETTAS IN FRANKENSTEIN

As the novel progresses it becomes increasingly obvious that Frankenstein and the creature cannot escape from a destructive cycle of revenge.
- When Frankenstein refuses to accept and care for his creation, the creature sets out to wreak his revenge – though not before he has given Victor the chance to do the right thing.

- o A responsible creator should care for his creation and, in failing to do so, Victor condemns the creature to a life of isolation and loneliness.
  - ▪ Remember: while hiding in the outhouse behind the de Laceys' cottage, the creature reads *Paradise Lost*.
    - • Like Satan in that poem, the creature takes his revenge not directly on his creator, but by attacking the people who are most dear to his creator – his family and friends.
      - o As the deaths begin to mount up
        - ▪ William,
        - ▪ Justine Moritz,
        - ▪ Clerval,
        - ▪ Elizabeth, his father
          - • Frankenstein becomes more and more vengeful himself and determines to destroy the creature.

COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS: DECAY

One of the major goals of the gothic genre is to tap into the subconscious fears of a particular society
- • the gothic genre evolved from Jacobean tragedies such as Macbeth
  - o and became extremely popular in the Victorian period as a way of reflecting Victorian fears about their society...
    - ▪ one of their major fears was that their society which they believed to be the best in the world would one day break down and decay
      - • so what you often get in gothic texts is descriptions of decay and neglect –
        - o authors often demonstrate how neglect often leads to decay
          - ▪ decay can be portrayed in any number of ways:
            - • physical decay of the human body
            - • decay of buildings
              - o for example, crumbling cathedrals
            - • decay of institutions
              - o educational institutions
              - o government institutions
              - o medical institutions, etc
                - ▪ authors often illustrate to the reader how institutions which once were so powerful, begin to crumble
            - • decay of the mind
            - • decay of morality
            - • decay of important national symbols, such as "the Victorian Gentleman"
              - o this is sometimes represented through aberrant behaviour

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COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS: DECAY IN FRANKENSTEIN

Frankenstein raids the graveyards of Ingolstadt for body parts.
- This connects his work closely with decay and disease.
  - It is ironic that his creation – life – is constructed from decayed bodies.
    - This could represent the decay of Victor's soul and morals.
      - Similarly, it might reflect the decay of human society, which allows such scientific exploration and then thoughtlessly rejects the creature simply because of the way he looks.
        - Remember: when he is rescued by Walton, Frankenstein is emaciated and terminally ill.
          - It is as if he is being 'eaten alive' by his hatred of the creature.

COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS: DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Death and destruction link closely to decay and disease.
- Readers know that Frankenstein cannot survive for long after his rescue from the drifting ice; he is mortally ill.
  - Death is constant in the novel as one by one Frankenstein's family die at the hands of the creature.
    - It seems ironic that these deaths are caused by Frankenstein's ambition to create life.
      - Death and destruction could reflect the death of Victor's moral responsibility and the destruction of his hopes and dreams.
        - It is therefore appropriate that Frankenstein should end with the deaths of both Victor and the creature.
          - Remember: Paradise Lost and the Prometheus myth both involve characters who are mortal and who are immortal.
            - Frankenstein and Walton both dream of immortal fame for their scientific achievements, but as a consequence of their actions both are forced to recognise their mortality.

COMMON GOTHIC ELEMENTS: GOOD & EVIL IN FRANKENSTEIN

Frankenstein explores good and evil.
- An important concept here is the idea of 'original sin'. In the Bible this idea is found in the story of Adam and Eve, who are tempted to sin by the serpent.
  - Sin and punishment are also central to the three main literary sources for Frankenstein:
    - Paradise Lost,
    - The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
    - and the Prometheus myth.
      - Frankenstein explores how good can be turned into evil.
        - At first the creature is benevolent and loving. It is through the rejection and cruelty of humans that he is transformed into the evil and vengeful beast of popular imagination.
          - The potential of science and human nature for both good and evil are considered in Frankenstein.

- Both Victor and Walton believe that science and exploration can broaden and improve existence.
  - When he is making the creature Victor envisages a race of beautiful and well-meaning people, while Walton is seeking a new passage for shipping to improve communications.
    - Both, however, are also relentlessly driven by the hope of fame and are prepared to make morally dubious decisions. In this sense, the novel is a kind of morality tale.

FRANKENSTEIN AND PARADISE LOST

Victor Frankenstein, playing God, resembles Satan from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan is an archangel punished for his
- vanity,
- arrogance,
- and thirst for forbidden knowledge.
  - Like him, Victor attempts to take over God's role as creator and master of the universe.
    - This achievement, Victor imagines, will be a superior one, and the exuberant and admirable beings that he creates will worship and honor him like a most deserving father.

THE ROMANTICS, FRANKENSTEIN AND PARADISE LOST

The Romantics, especially
- Blake,
- Byron,
- and Percy Shelley
  - interpreted Milton's account of the biblical story of Genesis as a celebration of Satan —
    - the rebellious hero who defies the power of God.
      - They regarded Satan not as the embodiment of evil,
        - but as a victim of the tyrannical power of the establishment.

DR. FRANKENSTEIN AND SATAN IN PARADISE LOST

Like Milton's Satan, Victor Frankenstein is a rebellious character who has faith in his own creative powers
- and has the courage to aspire higher than his limited human condition allows.
  - However, Mary Shelley does not present Victor's acts as positive or admirable.
    - Victor's intellectual curiosity and ambition does not contribute to any scientific advancement or social progress.
      - Instead, he destroys a family and, symbolically, populates the world with monstrous fantasies.

GOTHIC LITERATURE: A REBELLION AGAINST RATIONALISM

The traditional Gothic was a conscious rebellion against…
- cold,
- sterile rationalism, which dismayed readers with its…
  - precise regularities,
  - artificial control,
  - and banishment of emotion.

NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO GOTHIC LITERATURE

During the Neoclassic era (1660 - 1798). fastidious writers and critics held resurgences of fancy at bay and brandished the term "Gothic" contemptuously as a pejorative meaning:
- crude,
- barbaric,
- unlettered,
- disorderly,
- and licentious.

NEO-CLASSIC VS GOTHIC WRITERS

Unlike the self-controlled, intellectual Neo-classics, Gothic writers gave full reign to…
- intuition,
- exuberance,
- variety,
- improbability,
- rough behaviors,
- and morbid fantasies.

GOTHIC: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

Critics often see Gothic literature as a psychological phenomenon,
- it is to do with the ways in which otherwise repressed fears are represented in textual form

CONVENTION: ATTEMPTING TO EXPLAIN HUMAN BAHAVIOUR

The peculiarities of behavior in Gothic literature derive from author's intent to explain…
- the perverse,
- cruel,
- and murderous tendencies in human nature.
  - By examining…
    - dialogue,
    - dreams,
    - visions,
    - and delusions,
      - Gothic authors provide psychological insight into human perversity
      - and the survival instincts that enable individuals to combat terrifying experiences,

SATISFYING A DEMAND FOR THE MACABRE

gothic fiction depicts through story, the deepest human dread.
- the genre grew into a phenomenon of reader demand for superstition and the macabre.
  - the sinister novel profited from a marriage of high romanticism to pseudo-medievalism,
    - a dizzying, at times voluptuous union.

CONVENTION: FOCUS ON SUBCONSCIOUS

in the 1900s, a shift from the castle setting and medieval trappings of formulaic Gothicism preceded a focus on…
- Mystery
- Eeriness
- Surreality
- subconscious impulses
- and terror,
  - as found in a classic example from the American South, the novel Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937).
    - Mary Shelley claimed that Frankenstein actually was inspired by a nightmare she had after discussing the experiments of Erasmus Darwin to animate lifeless matter.

CONVENTION: DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

Gothic fiction was born as a methodology for writing nightmares.
- Mary Shelley claimed that Frankenstein actually was inspired by a nightmare she had after discussing the experiments of Erasmus Darwin to animate lifeless matter.

- Horace Walpole claimed that he wrote the very first Gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto, after having a nightmare in June 1764 of a giant armoured hand reaching out of a castle hallway
  - and since that one night of unquiet sleep in the mid-eighteenth century the form has gone on to articulate the
    - nightmares
    - hallucinations
    - phobias
    - anxieties
    - and drug-induced deliriums of generations of subsequent writers.

CONVENTION: DREAMS, NIGHTMARES, AND HUMAN FEARS

Whether or not they are literally dreamed into being, all works of Gothic fiction, if they are to function as such, must reflect the
- fears and anxieties of their readers and writers
  - and indeed often do so with an almost embarrassing obviousness:
    - for example, many of the Gothic novels written in the 1790s are clearly deeply concerned with the French Revolution, whatever their notional subject matter,
      - just as much of the horror fiction of the 1960s and 70s,
        - with its apocalyptic terrors and zombie plagues, is transparently about the threat of nuclear war.
          - Thus, at the heart of almost all such fiction lies
            - a scene of fear
            - a traumatic encounter with the terrible
              - and in literature and film alike these scenes are often marked with characteristics redolent of the experience of nightmare:
                - the dilation of time
                - the rupture of linear experience
                - and feelings of helplessness, horror, and dread

UNCERTAINTIES IN THE HUMAN MIND

Night time phantasms are realistic landscapes on which the psyche combats terrifying threats.
- Gothic literature taps the uncertainties that lurk in the mind when the body stretches out for rest and surrenders thoughts to the fantasies of sleep
  - Dreams were integral to the plots of 19th- century fiction;
    - retreats into the subconcious are probings that illuminate universal realities—
      - the curiosities
      - impulses
      - and urges that drive the conscious mind to strange actions
        - Dream-states reflect the psychological under- pinnings of mid-19th-century Gothic fiction.

WHAT HUMAN FEARS DOES THE MONSTER REPRESENT?

the monster can be seen to represent xenophobia. …
- Frankenstein is afraid of what the monster will do
  - and he is afraid because he doesn't know what it is capable of or if he will be able to control it
    - He is afraid of what he has created and how he created it.
      - Perhaps, however, a more interesting view would be that the monster represents Victorian society's fear of the power of science itself and the things it can create
        - Nevertheless, this fear was not unique to the Victorians
          - Lord of the Flies offers a more modern perspective on this
            - Golding portrays atomic weapons as the monsters of the modern world, created by unchecked science
              - Shelley's question in Frankenstein could be about the limits of scientific creation
                - "Just because we can create something, does that mean we should?"
                - And
                - "And are we prepared to take responsibility for the things we create?"

MENTAL LANDSCAPE

The landscape is not just a background
- it represents the inner, mental, emotional landscape of the writer and / or the characters
  - This is also known as a mental landscape.
    - A mental landscape is a landscape that reflects the thoughts and feelings of the characters, who view it or journey through it.
      - Often the language about landscape can also be used of the mind.
        - This idea of an intimate connection between the landscape and the "soul", the mental landscape, is common throughout many literary genres but has its origins in Gothic fiction.
          - For example, the haunted castle with all its horrors can be viewed as a projection of the corrupt and malevolent psyche of its master.
            - The castle becomes a character in its own right.
              - The skeletons hidden in chests and closets symbolize repressed desires
              - ghosts represent unconscious fears
              - and monsters are manifestations of the uncanny in the Freudian sense.

- In mental landscape, the reader is implicitly invited to see that the landscape is an expression of the mind of the character that moves through it.

VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DOPPELNGANGER

The idea of the doppelganger can be interpreted in a number of ways:
- it can be seen simply as a **double**, an alternative version of the individual concerned;
- it can be seen as a **complement**, a version of the individual that possesses different qualities and thus completes the personality;
- it can be seen as an **opposite**, a being that possesses all the qualities that the individual lacks and most abhors.

THE DOPPELNGANGER CONCEPT IN FRANKENSTEIN

The use of the doppelganger in Frankenstein comes closest to the third of these interpretations:
- the monster becomes a kind of external embodiment of Frankenstein's increasingly divided and conflicted personality
- he is living proof that Victor has become separated from the best in himself and the potential for using his intelligence and skill for beneficial purposes
- as he obsessively pursues his studies, Frankenstein divides his head from his heart; his intellect and desire for scientific knowledge separate from his emotions, affections and responsibilities to other people.
- the monster's ugliness makes him the image of a purely intellectual, heartless Victor, the opposite of the young man who begins his studies with hope and the desire to contribute to the improvement of humanity.

CONVENTION: AN ANCIENT PROPHECY

An ancient prophecy is commonly connected with a castle or its inhabitants (either former or present).
- The prophecy is usually obscure, partial, or confusing.
  - "What could it mean?"
    - In more watered down modern examples, this may amount to merely a legend: "It's said that the ghost of old man Krebs still wanders these halls."
      - Ancient, undecipherable maps showing the location of amazing treasure represent another variant of the ancient prophecy aspect.

SUBTITLE ALLUDES TO PROPHECY IN FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley alludes to the story's prophecy through the subtitle, *Frankenstein*
- ,or The Modern Prometheus

o   To understand this allusion we need to step back and look Prometheus's story.

THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS

In classical mythology, Prometheus is attributed as the creator of mankind.
- He formed the first men out of clay from the earth, which Athena then breathed life into.
  o   As the father of mankind, Prometheus cared for them and taught them the arts necessary to survive, like
    - plowing and harvesting a field
    - hunting
    - and building homes.
      - The story continues to Prometheus's theft of fire, for which Zeus punished him.
        o   He steals fire from the gods to give to man
          - to encourage and enable them to prosper, learn, and discover new things.

THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS AND FRANKENSTEIN

The subtitle functions as an appositive to the primary title;
- Shelley likens Frankenstein to the classical father of mankind.
  o   The most obvious correlation is that both figures form a living being out of lifeless material.
    - Frankenstein's ambitions are aimed towards "a new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve of theirs" (80-82).
      - In the Romantic era, Prometheus came to be regarded as a symbol for civilization and intelligence, as well as scientific knowledge.
        o   Victor himself, in his early studies, felt as though "the world was to me was a secret, which I desired to discover" (66).
          - His longing to learn the secrets of the world led him to look beyond what was natural for man to achieve.
          - He longed to go deeper into scientific knowledge and expand the possibilities of human civilization.
            - But like with Prometheus, going beyond the natural limits of man results in consequences.
              o   Prometheus was punished for loving his creation too well by giving him the necessities for progress (fire).
                - Frankenstein, on the other hand, is disgusted by his work, and his work will eventually turn on him.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROMETHEUS IN FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) is the story of a man who tries to create a superior creature but accidentally creates a monster.

- But there's a much deeper meaning behind this story aside from the warning that we shouldn't play God.
  - By likening Frankenstein to a "Modern Prometheus", is Shelley doing more than just drawing a comparison,
  - or is she commenting on the nature of man's pursuits of knowledge?
  - Is the "Modern" state of man's creation beneficial or detrimental to a healthy civilization?
    - The Frankenstein myth, according to author Yuval Noah Harari, tells us that humanity's last days are fast approaching.
      - Simply put, the pace of technological progress will soon lead to us being replaced by creatures who are physically, cognitively, and emotionally superior.

CONVENTION: CREATING SHOCK

To create the stark, sometimes shocking contrast that fuels Gothic romance, they often focused on the control, torment, and/or murder of an inexperienced female naif.

- The early Gothic masters ornamented verse and fiction with…
  - outrage,
  - the supernatural,
  - mystery,
  - pathetic fallacy,
  - chiaroscuro,
  - and a foreign exoticism
    - against a backdrop of…
      - dim,
      - stormy nights
      - and characters peering through the mist from massy battlements at…
        - dismaying rogues,
        - stalkers,
        - or monsters.

CONVENTION: SINISTER PARAPHERNALIA

Contributing to a terror of obscure phantasms and entrapment is often a collection of sinister paraphernalia,

- hidden passageways,
- sliding panels,
- and trapdoors that allowed villains access to hapless victims.
  - Often to heightening reader response are ominous sense impressions.

CONVENTION: THE DOPPELNGANGER

A mirroring or duality of a character's persona, the concept of the doppelgänger refers to the …
- twin,
- shadow double,
- demon double,
- and split personality,
  - all common characterizations in world folklore., dating back to playwright Plautus in Republican Rome
    - and his separated twins in Menaechmi (186 B.C.)
    - and to possession by a Dybbuk in Jewish Kabalism,
      - the concept of paired characters evolved into a psychological study of duality in a single person.
      - The term doppelgänger derives from the German "double goer" or "double walker,"
        - a complex characterization that novelist Jean Paul Richter coined in Siebenkäs (1796), a novel depicting a bisected persona.
          - The story was the beginning of a subset of Gothic psychological fiction in which characters gaze inward at warring dichotomies through…
            - shadowscapes,
            - look-alikes,
            - mirror images,
            - portraits and statues,
            - and dreams
            - and nightmares.
              - The doppelgänger motif typically depicts a double who is both duplicate and antithesis of the original

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CONVENTION: SYMBOLS

The presentation of…
- literal
- and symbolic meaning through allegory…
  - heightens meaning,
  - makes themes more striking and vivid
  - and promotes atmosphere and characterization.