Prohibition and transgression: the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic novel

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The eighteenth-century gothic movement was a reaction to the dominance of the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and rationalism and was seen by some as the natural literary result of the violence and terror of the French Revolution. Its conventions included aristocratic villains and persecuted maidens, the supernatural, the victory of nature over man's creations and of chaos over order, and the theme of imprisonment with consciousness forced back upon itself. As a transgressive sub-genre of the novel, it was anti-Catholic, anti-nostalgic, and anti-aristocratic. It evolved in the Victorian age to reflect nineteenth-century concerns about race, gender, imperialism, and cultural degeneration. This course will trace its development from the first gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The castle of Otranto* (1764), to Bram Stoker's presentation of fin-de-siècle anxiety in *Dracula* (1897). Other novels to be discussed include Ann Radcliffe's highly influential novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), Jane Austen's witty and complex parody of the genre, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and Charlotte Brontë's domestic re-imagining of the gothic romance in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Students will also have the opportunity to read gothic fiction by Mary Shelley and Oscar Wilde and will be able to take advantage of world class art galleries in Oxford and London to see for themselves how gothic themes caught the imagination of contemporary artists and architects and how they translated them into paintings and drawings, many of which acted as inspiration for the writers themselves.

Seminar specific student learning outcomes

Students who have taken this seminar will:

- have considered the effect of politics, science, religion, and gender on the acts of writing and reading in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and today
- be able to place the readings in historical, cultural, and literary context

Required reading (listed in the order in which the novels will be considered in discussion classes)

The Norton or Broadview Critical Editions are preferred but Oxford World's Classics or Penguin Classics editions are acceptable.

- C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847; ed. R. Dunn, 2001)
- B. Stoker, *Dracula* (1897; ed. N. Auerbach, 1997)

Recommended reading list

- M. Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, the modern Prometheus* (1816; 1831; ed. P. Hunter, 2012)