

English 149 (Fall 2005)

Dr. Katherine Harris

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (pub.1818 & 1831)

GOTHIC NOVEL

A type of romance very popular late in the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century, which has had considerable influence on fiction since. Most Gothic novels were tales of mystery and horror, intended to chill the spine and curdle the blood. They contained a strong element of the supernatural and the now traditional "haunted house" props. Often they were set in medieval castles which had secret passages, dungeons, winding stairways, a stupefying atmosphere of doom and gloom and a proper complement of spooky happenings and clanking ghosts. Other characteristics include:

- **Elements/Structure of Gothic Fiction:**
 - Setting = foreign land
 - Atmosphere = brooding and unknown terror
 - Plot
 - Exploration of the unknown or supernatural (wild)
 - Combines horror, crime, romance, realism and tragic events
 - Characters
 - Hero in search of self; usually has an irreversible fate
 - see definition of "**Byronic Hero**"
 - "damsels in distress" in strange and terrifying locales
 - Ghosts/monsters haunt the hero for his actions
- **Themes:**
 - sexuality, danger, desire, femininity
 - supernatural element
 - power gone mad
 - female rage & sexual desire
 - moral virtue emerges in different forms
 - slightly anachronistic/medieval morality
 - opens up dark, irrational side of the mind

CHARACTERS (VOL. I)

Ship on journey to explore the North Pole (setting)

Robert Walton

Mrs. Margaret Saville

Geneva (setting)

Alphonse Frankenstein

Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein

Victor Frankenstein

Elizabeth Lavenza (later Frankenstein)

Henry Clerval

Cornelius Agrippa

M. Waldman

Monster

Ernest Frankenstein

William Frankenstein

Justine Moritz

THEMES

1831 Introduction

Narrative Structure

Gothic Setting

Robert Walton (British) as narrator

Victor Frankenstein (foreign) as Byronic Hero

Importance of Well-Rounded Education

Reason & Imagination = necessary contraries to find Truth (P.B. Shelley)

Dead Mothers (no guidance)

"Savage" Monster embodies contraries: education & nature; tame humanity & wild passion