



LTEN 140: Gothic Fiction

Prof. Nicolazzo / TuTh 5:00-6:20

Fear of war, fear of foreign influence, fear of state repression, fear of popular revolt, and fear of increasingly harsh punishment for voicing dissent: these were among the many fears circulating in England in the 1790s. This time of revolution and reaction also saw the rise of an immensely popular genre of fiction whose major selling point was its ability to inspire terror. Dismissed by reviewers as "terrorist novel-writing" and satirized by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, the explosion of fiction we now call "gothic" provoked both aesthetic controversy and intense readerly demand. From Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, we'll explore the origins of some of the foundational texts, tropes, and ideas that continue to inform our idea of horror today.

Of particular concern for us this quarter will be understanding the gothic in its immediate political context: for example, both the conservative politician Edmund Burke and radical thinkers like William Godwin and Mary Hays drew on gothic tropes to advance their arguments. Across the political spectrum, fear proved a potent political force. By reading some of the most important gothic novels alongside historical newspapers, political pamphlets, and literary reviews, we will ask how this genre responded to its immediate historical context and what its enduring legacy might teach us about the politics of fear and sensation.

Fulfills the B requirement of the Literatures in English major.