LIT3101

Week 1 – Lecture - Gothic Fragments

Caleb Williams

May not seem notably gothic, yet there’s something about strange obsession between faukland and caleb that trips over to psychological excess

Secondary reading = CW early example of detective/gothic novel

Feels as tho its politics are quite clear, yet there are ways in which it transcends this – psychological obsession takes over

Frankenstein- science divorced of moral code = monsters – lot more gothic

Gothic has prominence 1780-1820 during this period

Radcliffe = best selling novelist of this period, reason for this? This gothic ‘hayday’ coincides w/ economic, political, social crisis – gothic becomes appropriate literary .. to explore these national/international crises

CW/Frankenstein early gothic, then disappears and infiltrates other type of literature – Jane Eyre, madness hidden away in buildings and indeed narratives – Gothic doesn’t disappear just infiltrates othertypes of lit that u wouldn’t expect to be gothic

Until it reemerges into sensation lit later – wilkie Collins

Then reinterst, Dracula/ Jekyll n hyde/ dorian gray

Early symbolism oft he form:

How you’d read it: it feels that it’s escapist literature fantasy?– worlds not necessarily part of people’s lives

However, uncanny parallels which connote people’s realities n political realities especially, as it develops out of a period of political change

Castle of a Tranta? – opening scenes, wedding Manfred legit prince trying to ensure powerbase to get married off – conrad comes to slightly serial end “he beheld his child dashed to pieces, and almost buried under an enormous helmet, an hundred times more large than any casque ever made for human being, and shaded with a proportionable quantity of black feathers”

Revealed that a stature came alive – Alonzo the God = actual legitimate heir

^this moment feels devoid of any sense of reality ,surreal etc – almost on verge of comedy?/ parody of gothic novel? Ofc cant be but feels it – enaugerates gothic in British tradit.

How do we make sense of the gothic in the novel?

^forms a reputation of novel that appears really mobile/ things coming alive etc

* Various cultural analyses during period, 1862Richard Hurd writing about chivalry – Would we know, from what causes the institution of chivalry was derived? The time of its birth, the situation of the barbarians amongst whom it arose, must be considered: their wants, designs and policies must be explored.

^origins of a model of smth – chivalry- may pave way to answer, consider as political entity – think of how symbolically scale of authority is repreented - reason why fantasy/ giant etc are so big is bc the scale of the knight/authority is so big

Read the fantastic literally – aka what they represent as policies, designes, political narratives that work within gothic narratives

Mediavel romances/ faery queen etc – early fantastical forms of lit/ dominated by giant unreal figures

First serious commentator of what it might mean, the gothic.

Preface of 2nd edition of Tranta book

Modern romance which blends romance with otherwise fantastical vision – why he wrote novel? Bc he had a dream – becomes popular theme to claim authors ideas come from nightmare/dream, mary shelley on frank/ Dracula/ Jekyll n hyde

Walpol dream letter to Cole – cole = mp

I waked one morning at the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with gothic story) and that on the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armout. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least wha I intended to say or relate. The work gre on my hands, and I gre fond of it = I must add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics/

^not about politics???

BUT discussions in pol. Atm

^ whether aristocrats own their land 1760s or whether they can put in place leg/ to able arist/ to sell land/ free up cash to make them feel competitive in emerging laissez fair economy – Walpole is an earl so interested in it? In parl. They say no u cant sell – Walpole just keeper as Earl, holding it in trust, can’t say it really belongs to him but to next person – this law – Law of Mortmane – dead hand of the past – inheritance ancestral

^this dream is about mortmane – old hand in armour, not free to wander round freely in hallways, bc it’s owned by next person – freustrating aw of mortmane past and future has hold over u

Asset rich/ cash poor? New class in town? Mid class arriving – these people have the wealth, more welaht = more power, thus aristoc left behind?

His dream is symbolically all about what’s going on in pol/government atm

^how it is that gothic works through these symbolic moments etc

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Gothic as form? What are themes/ principle characteristics

Predominent themes at time:

* Imagines of taboo

(increasing about sexuality, can’t be expressed or needed to be hidden away) Rochester = bertha worse than any harlets ?

* Paranoia – CW transcends political story of injustice, Faukland’s peculiar obsession with Caleb trips into paranoia? What it is CW knows or could incriminate Faukland – elements of Frankenstein too, idea of 2 men peculiar obsession with each other
* Barbarism – uncivilised, also sense of the past – modern world ghosted by something can’t quite pass off – also in late 19th cent. Gothic, old centuries have powers that mere modernity can’t rid of them with

Frank – pursuit of beauty / tries to get over death and tries to make it as beautiful as poss. is failure v ugly and barbaric

Also period of revolutionary change – French rev scares – stirs up contemporary ideas/ conventions / revolutionary mode and change

Revolutions:

* Economic – the middle-class, pushes aristocracy aside – mid class aren’t tied to past / mortmane inheritance, can be self made – Great Expec? Gentlemanly script can be bought for you, world has moved forward in that respect
* French – ambivalent responses to it by may of authors – lot of pro-protestantism, England prot. Vs ‘’strange/superstitous’ Catholicism France Italy and their beliefs – prot. More stable etc

Central to all this, what we’re witnessing = various types of class changing,

The Italian – Radcliffe

Class – The dresses of the higher rank of visitors were as splendid as the scenery, of which Ellena was, in every respect, the queen. But this entertainment was not given to persons of distinction only, for both Ellena and Vivaldi had wished that all the tenants of the domain should partake of it.

^all society together and everyone is there but sat in rank, upholds establishment – everyone knows their place

At this point Radcliffe really trying to bring these issues home, stabilities we need to bring back security and value – novel set in Italy and in past – but she wants u to think about it here and now- not in an escapist way but reflectively –

^end of novel, wedding of Ellena – Radcliffe stands up for well-regulated society, if there are any supernatural happenings in Radcliffe, always explained away – bc Radcliffe = actually we have a society that it fundamentally hierarchical, protestant and stable – that is just feeling compromised during this period

What it’s like to read a novel like this at the time – revolutionary literature and time and energy

“The style of the gardens, where lawns and groves, and woods varies the undulating surface, was that of England, and of the present day, rather than of Italy” ----- end of book!!! Well regulated gardens like book, not going to descend into mobs like Italy but it is England – touches some sort of understanding

Presence of certain types of Gothic fiction

Radcliffe – Female Gothic – more about gesture and implication and subtlety, male gothic more violent and obvious?

Distinguished by Ellen Moers 1976

Themes: Upward social mobility/ Missing parents

Mary Shelley/Jane Austen/Charlotte Bronte

Jane Eyre example of female gothic, begins extraordinary isolation, discovery family, inheritance, position in world, class-bound happiness at end – political journey of upward social mobility

Jane eyre = love lets you into this well-structured position in society

Wuthering heights = love isn’t allowed into this world

Found repeatedly in non gothic texts ie Jane Austen? – same as Radcliffe without ghosts lol

Parental neglect? Jane eyre/ Frankenstein

Jane Austen – dealing with languages of revolution, not necessarily gothic? – but she is v shrewd in wanting to refer to wider geopolitical context of things taking place:

Eg – P&J at end, account of what happened to main characters who have to renegotiate relationship – sense of this all of this taking place against backdrop French rev

Their manner of living even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation and always spending more than they ought. (Wickham and Lydia)

Wanting to draw parallels – domestic peace = national peace

Charming as were all Mrs/ Radcliffes’ works … it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. .. in that part of central England there was rurely some security … Murder was not tolerated, servants were not slaves, and neither poisons nor sleeping potions were to be procured, like rhubarb, from every drugstore –

^Jane Austen (northanger abbey) reason for gothic?

^work/labour that takes place, particularly female – domestic – her castles feel like domestic spaces

Critics picked up on stuff in northanger abbey – confirms of writing about here and now – she finds chest in room and might find gothic narrative hidden away

“her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started at its import. Could it be possible, or did not her sense play her false? An inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters, seemed all that was before her! If the evidence of sight might be trusted, she held a washing bill in her hand.

^ gothic anti-climax?

Critics = this = Life governed by domestic grudgery – there is a horror in this moment, that nothing is happening in your life

Is there was something in the chest gothic – that = domesticism, what is capturing the horror in this novel in this instance could be just finding nothing

Difficulty with communication

A lot have p elaborate narrative structures

Peter Brookes on Frank –

With the arrival of Safie, we have a lesson in French being offered to a Turkish Arab, in a German-speaking region, the whole rendered for the reader in English

Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts 1979

Narratives are encoded in other people’s lives // mediation of stories important

Frank – difficulty of establishing forms of communication, viktor knows he needs to communicate with creature but cant get over how he looks “when I listened to him…when I looked at him” – The creature was kneeling like my own vampire to do my bididng – Frank isn’t the monster, shows how behaviour passed down ?????

Caleb speaks seamlessly in stolen rhetoric of F. – Caleb is incriminated by speaking words that aren’t his????

Failed utopias –

Political sense of period

Utopian vision

Viktor

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful Great God. His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a

Failure here of aesthetics – paradise lost – utopias not established, tempting to read of political, creating new kind of utopia, but all of this utopian zeal hasn’t created v much? Should we be nostalgic or do things in different way?

Is a sense that: these languages have somehow failed but who knows they may be there for us again

Ambivalence – Farewell Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparentl innocent one of distinguishing your self in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed.

Utopian spirit

Conclude

Gothic is:

* Symbolic, cryptic questioning
* Psychological and politica
* Focused on authority and authority figures – arist, nuns and monks
* Ambivalent about social and political change creature in Frankenstein has an alibi of why he is how he is -cant make judgment of moral clarity we might want to do .