English Literature No 1

A Masterclass in the Gothic

Peripeteia is a project that tries to connect people together to create a vibrant online literary community, to encourage literary discussion among students and teachers from different institutions.

Definitions

How might one define the Gothic? For one contributor, 'aside from people with black, crimped hair and stripey tights,' the Gothic, 'makes me think that the text will be 'disturbing', whether describing actual events or psychological ones. It conjures up ideas of things buried, or hidden. It hints at everything that we can't quite grasp, everything that's beyond our reason'.

Drs. Wright and Townshend agreed that Gothic texts are often disturbing on a number of levels, but especially in terms of psychology. As a literature of transgression and excess, 'The Gothic' unsettles literary conventions and decorum. Gothic texts also often explore 'the return of the repressed'. Generally we think of ourselves as becoming over time more civilized and rational, and less superstitious; the Gothic reminds us that we haven't necessarily escaped the fears of our past, fears that continue to haunt us.

Perhaps 'The Gothic' can be seen as the disturbed twin or twisted offspring of Romantic literature, suggested one member. Think, for instance, of Frankenstein as a character. In many ways he is similar to a Romantic hero, but his quest for knowledge tips him over into Gothic obsession, transgression and over-reaching. For some critics Frankenstein is a portrait of a specific Romantic hero.

Dr. Townshend suggested that while the Gothic is notoriously difficult to pin down as a term, Gothic Literature always has 'a concern with unsettling, incarcerating space; psychological horror and terror; something that disturbs; and the supernatural.'

Dr. Wright added that Gothic texts reflect the fears and desires of a culture, express its dreams and nightmares, often through supernaturalising these repressed feelings: 'Although 'The Gothic' is full of ghosts, terrors, psychological horrors and nightmares, there is also a firm grounding for in the contemporary anxieties of its time. One of my favourite and first-read critical explanations of 'The Gothic', from David Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, argued that:

the Gothic is revealed as not an escape from the real but a deconstruction and dismemberment of it (David Punter, 1996)

Think, for example, of the female vampires in *Dracula*. When confronted by these creatures our hero falls down in a swoon, his eyelids fluttering. The emasculation of Jonathan Harker shows clearly how the vampires embody Victorian men's fear of the rising power of women. More specifically, the vampire embodies the demonisation of female sexuality.

Just as we can understand Stoker's presentation of the female vampires more fully if we put the novel into its late Victorian context, Dr. Wright went on to explain the importance of understanding the historical context of the literary use of the word 'Gothic': 'Horace Walpole was the first to use the term 'Gothic' in 1765 in 'The Castle of

Otranto', so when we associate it with a type of literary fiction, we need to go back to the eighteenth century.'

Who were the Goths?

To understand what Horace Walpole meant when he used the term 'Gothic' Dr. Townshend suggested we need to go back even further in history to explore the origin of the term and its developing significance:

'The Goths were held responsible for the sacking of the Roman Empire, the height of 'civilisation'. So Gothic means, in part, that which resists/defies/shatters Roman (and Greek) ideals ... which meant balance, proportion, rhythm, and unity of time and space. Gothic, aesthetically, was a mode that resisted these principles...the aesthetic style of the Gothic was seen, in part, as barbaric. The term took on its dark associations as a marker of the barbaric past during the renaissance, when renaissance historians wrote off the medieval past as 'Gothic'. Here, gothic means 'dark, uncivilised, benighted...'

Relating these ideas to Walpole's use of the term, Dr. Townshend concluded that:

'...In the eighteenth century to embrace things Gothic was, some critics believe, to turn away from all that the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on order and reason and rationality, held dear.'

Recurring Gothic tropes

One problem with the term 'Gothic' is its shape-shifting, chameleon nature. Early Gothic novels are quite different to *Frankenstein*, for instance, and by the Victorian age Gothic has transformed again. Dr Wright suggested that a useful way of defining the literature is through identifying key features which remain constant. One such example is the use of the trope of telling someone else's tale:

'The fact that Walpole also claimed that it was a translation in the first edition is really significant (this was not true). It introduces one of the most stable Gothic tropes that persists to this day; it is present in The Castle of Otranto, Ann Radcliffe's The Romance of the Forest and The Mysteries of Udolpho. In the nineteenth century, Frankenstein may not seem to be about a manuscript, but consider the epistolary nature of the novel. It is, in essence, a series of letters, as Dracula much later is a series of documents ... So translating, deciphering a tale that someone else has told at an earlier date, becomes crucial to the Gothic...'

Dr. Wright suggested the same concerns with fabrication and unreliability are found in Shelley's novel:

'One of the most important parts of 'Frankenstein' to me is the brief observation by Walton towards the end of the novel that Frankenstein 'augmented' parts of his retelling of the tale to add life to the conversations between him and his creature.

'The novel itself consists of a story being retransmitted through different characters and different perspectives. It also links to the idea of uncertainty and terror: we are never really certain how to view any of the characters, or whose narrative to trust,' suggested another contributor, focusing on the unreliability of narration and how this technique may reflect a wider loss of stability and certainty in a culture:

'Unreliability creates a sense of the world gone awry that is crucial to the Gothic,' commented Dr Townshend.

Unreliability is all the more unsettling because often the narration is presented as seductive, according to Dr. Wright:

'The text is replete with images of listeners being wooed and manipulated by the oral tales of others - as Margaret Homans has famously observed: Walton and Victor; Victor and the monster; De lacey and the monster - now ... if Victor's tale is, to top it all, one big fabrication ...'

Another persistent feature of 'Gothic Novels' is the cobbling together of disparate parts and existing discourses to create something new. The monster in *Frankenstein* is constructed from bits of various bodies; *Dracula* is partly a Jew, partly an Eastern European Aristocrat, partly an animal and partly a demon; the narratives within both novels are constructed by a number of narrators, in forms including diary entries, newspaper clippings and letters. And Shelley's novel itself was constructed through Shelley's use of other 'intertexts' according to Dr. Townshend:

'...such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau; John Locke; the writings of her parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft; and, science (e.g. galvanism) of the early nineteenth century. This reliance upon intertexts accords well with Shelley's account of the creation process is the Preface to the 1831 edition - there is no such thing as creation ex nihilo (out of nothing). All acts of creation necessary reassemble things that have existed before - not unlike the creature itself.'

Monsters

The discussion ended with a consideration of Shelley's depiction of Frankenstein's creature and of the nature of monstrosity. Monsters identified as being present in the novel included fathers, science itself, the human body, the masculine quest for knowledge, science itself and even Shelley's own husband, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley!

Dr. Townshend felt that, 'the novel expresses rage against all forms of paternity, including Shelley's own.' He argued that *Frankenstein* differed from early Gothic texts in its identification of monstrosity: 'One of the reasons why *Frankenstein* is not, immediately, Gothic is because the role of the supernatural has been occupied by SCIENCE!'

Dr. Wright in considering how human bodies are presented in Gothic texts argued that our bodies are defamiliarised and bemonstered:

'It is almost reverse blazon in a way, taking the sonneteering tradition's praise of individual parts of the lover's body, and then perverting that. The Gothic's focus upon separate body parts in many ways epitomises its monstrosity for me; not just the monstrosity of abnormal bodies, but it also draws attention to the abnormalities of its intertexts.

'The quest for knowledge, amongst other things, is a very masculine prerogative in the novel,' continued Dr. Townshend. 'Also, critics often read into Victor a negative, critical image of Shelley's own husband, P. B. Shelley, the Romantic poet/outsider/frenzied creator.'

Mary Shelley's own experiences of her mother's death in childbirth and her own pregnancies may also have played a part. As Dr. Townshend pointed out, 'It's no coincidence that the time that lapses between the opening and closing of the novel is 9 months: it is, as Ellen Moers has argued, a 'birth myth' or a 'phantasmagoria of the nursery.' The absent mother - or, when present, the over-bearing mother - is central to the Gothic.' https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/articles/15502

English Literature No 2

Terror and Wonder: 10 key elements of Gothic literature

Are you ready for fright night? Halloween is approaching and so is a fresh crop of scary movies, including a new adaptation of Frankenstein. Many of the elements in horror films share similar stylistic tricks to those in Gothic literature.

Gothic elements include the following:

Corvin Castle, Hunedoara, Transylvania, Romania by Simon Marsden (1948-2012) / Bridgeman Images

1. Set in a haunted castle or house

The main location, usually an old castle plagued by an ancestral curse, is a vital element in Gothic fiction, providing a dark and threatening back-drop.
Horace Walpole was avidly interested in medieval architecture, transforming his villa into a castle, complete with turrets and towers. It is an early example of Gothic Revival architecture.
Placing a story in a domineering Gothic building drew on feelings of awe and isolation. Corvin Castle is undoubtedly the spookiest of all Gothic castles, located in Transylvania. Vlad the Impaler III (more commonly known as Dracula) was allegedly held prisoner here. See more spooky buildings.

Actress Kathleen Hughes (b/w photo) / Underwood Archives/UIG / Bridgeman Images

2. A damsel in distress

The female lead often face events that leave them terrified, screaming and fainting. Returning to her medieval role as damsel in distress, the virtuous heroine is typically incarcerated in a castle and pursued by a sadistic aristocrat. Early examples in this genre include Matilda in Horace Walpole's 'The Castle of Otranto' and Emily in Ann Radcliffe's 'The Mysteries of Udolpho.'

Poster for the stage version of 'The Woman in White' by Wilkie Collins

Window, Castle Frankenstein (b/w photo) Simon Marsden

3. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense

The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. When first published, Wilkie Collin's 'The Woman in White' was identified as a "sensational novel." The story involves family secrets, faked identities, and false imprisonment.
Objects or paraphernalia which help create the Gothic atmosphere are burial vaults, suits of armour, flickering candles, cracked mirrors, portraits and evil potions.

4. There is a ghost or monster

In Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein', Victor Frankenstein creates a monster using body parts from deceased criminals in an attempt to make the perfect human being. Other main characters have included supernatural or grotesque creatures, ranging from vampires, devils, ghosts, monsters, demons, zombies to evil spirits, the "possessed," and werewolves.

Heathcliff and Cathy, from the novel Wuthering Heights, Robert Brook (20th Century) © Look and Learn / Bridgeman Images

5. The weather is always awful

Flashes of lightning accompany revelation and thunder and downpours usually prefigure the appearance of a character or the beginning of a significant event. The storms and wind that sweep through 'Wuthering Heights' signify how the characters are at the mercy of forces they cannot control. In 'Rebecca', the weather mirrors the characters' moods; a fog descends when the narrator, the second Mrs. de Winter is confused and depressed.

The Nightmare, 1781 by Henry Fuseli/ Detroit Institute of Arts / Bridgeman Images

6. Dreaming/nightmares

Fuseli, the quintessential Romantic artist is often quoted as saying, "One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams" and writers as diverse as Walpole, Stoker and Shelley were all inspired by vivid and unsettling nightmares.
Disturbing or prophetic dreams are frequently experienced by these writers' fictional characters as well, used as a plot device to emphasize their insecurities and fears.

Rochester, illustration from 'Characters of Romance', first published 1900, Sir William Nicholson

7. Burdened male protagonist

Aristocratic, suave, moody, solitary, cynical and nursing a guilty secret, this darkly attractive and conflicted male figure surfaces everywhere in Gothic fiction. Both Maxim in 'Rebecca' and Mr. Rochester in 'Jane Eyre' are tormented by their pasts and both their ancestral homes go up in flames. This curse or damnation is a "hangover" of traditional religious ideology to chastise the character for some wrong against the moral order. Haunted or hounded figures also include Mary Shelley's Frankenstein who is both pursued by and pursues his monster.

Illustration from 'Le Theatre' magazine, 1900s (litho), French School, (20th century) / Private Collection / © The Advertising Archives

8. Melodrama

Emotions run high in Gothic literature reflecting a heightened sense of drama. Women have a tendency to swoon and men rage in reflection of unseen inner torments. There are also murders, kidnappings and people going mad. The villain is usually the central character but fate intervenes in the end to ensure good triumphs over evil.

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari' 1919. German silent film. Universal History Archive/UIG / Bridgeman Images

9. Death

The Gothic novel is enthralled with death and the supernatural contributing to an atmosphere of horror. If Gothic literature reflects a wish to overcome one's mortality, there is also a fear of those who somehow manage to transcend it; i.e. vampires, whom are at once both dead and alive.
There is also a Gothic obsession with the bodies of dead women. Edgar Allan Poe said that the death of a beautiful woman is "the most poetical topic in the world". In nearly every one of his tales, one of the characters has died or is being mourned.

Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, pub. 1880s (colour litho), American School,/ Private Collection / Bridgeman Images

10. The beast within

Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' (1886) tapped into contemporary anxieties. Dr Jekyll is eminently respectable while Mr. Hyde is brutal and ape-like. The twist is that both represent two facets of the same person.
Influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, such a nightmarish biological lineage that denied the superiority of humans, feeds into many late-Victorian Gothic novels.

Bela Lugosi in costume as Dracula, 1931 / Bridgeman Images

The origins of the Gothic novel

The origin of the Gothic novel is largely attributed to Horace Walpole's 'The Castle of Otranto' in 1764, the story of which was inspired by a dream he had at Strawberry Hill, his ' little Gothic castle.'
The words Goth and Gothic describe the Germanic tribes (Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths) who ravaged Europe in the Middle Ages. By the eighteenth century in England, the term Gothic had become synonymous with the medieval era, perceived as superstitious, barbaric and unenlightened. It morphed into a genre of Gothic literature which had a fascination with death and the supernatural, influencing many art forms that we know today that seek to shock and entertain.

Portrait of Horatio Walpole, 4th Earl of Oxford, 1754 by John Giles Eckhardt (fl.1740-79) / National Portrait Gallery, London, UK

Gothic fiction tells us the truth about our divided nature Alison Milbank

Doppelganger tales undermine the modern idea of the self as invulnerable and in control of its passions

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As a scholar of Gothic fiction I research tales about vampires, ghosts and doppelgangers, and incestuous maniacs pursuing maidens down underground passages. What possible "truth" could such fictions offer? And even if they have truths to tell, what possible relevance could such discoveries have for a Christian audience? Many of my fellow critics would doubt that they have any but a negative truth to tell to religion. The taste for Gothic fiction begins in the Enlightenment period, when the truth claims of religion were being questioned. Maidens fleeing from the rapacious hands of murderous monks in the novels of Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis represent for many the attempt to escape from the constrictions of Christian belief and its oppressive institutions into secular freedom. Encounters with ghostly figures are taken as Kantian attempts to test the limits of reason itself.

But in the 19th century, attention moves to the horrors that lurk in our own psyche. The unconscious comes to be a subject of attention and exploration in stories such as the celebrated Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Although the haunting by a second self may appear to confirm the existence of the supernatural, ever since Freud this apparition has been understood not as a true spiritual presence but as a figure of repression. The eeriness of two selves where there should only be one is, Freud argued, an irruption of disquiet caused by our separation from our origin in our mother's womb. Uncanny is *unheimlich* in German, or "unhomely", and Freud claims it is the home that we refuse to acknowledge and from which we are estranged which causes the double among other eerie manifestations. Freud's theory is used to account for the plethora of double figures from Frankenstein and his Creature, Poe's William Wilson, Dorian Gray and his portrait, and the tortured protagonists of the Tales of Hoffman, all of whom play out the horror of duality, of a subjectivity rendered uncanny.

In discussing these tales as critiques, Gothic scholars tend to stress their revelation of "cultural anxieties", and the way in which they undermine the moral and religious status quo. Dr Jekyll, for example, is a highly respected physician, who lives in a large and handsome house, and moves in elevated professional circles, in which his own reputation stands high. There is, however, a shady back door to his house, out of which the apish, squat figure of Hyde emerges, to act out violent assaults with monstrous malice. He contradicts the moral behaviour of Dr Jekyll and questions the integrity of his social persona, just as the Gothic scholar aims to lift the veil on Victorian hypocrisy.

What allows this kind of critique is the development of a particular form of subjectivity, which the philosopher Charles Taylor in A Secular Age calls the "buffered self". In his extensive study of how the secular emerged in the modern world, Taylor locates the heart of the change in a seismic shift from the "porous" to the "buffered" self. In pre-modern societies, people inhabit a divinely created cosmos, full of spirits, good and bad, fairies, angels and natural forces, which are

seen also to have agency as "acts of God". Even inanimate objects, such as holy relics, can have power over us. Similarly, all levels of social organisation, from realm to parish and guild, are liturgically ordered and are grounded in a higher reality. The self in all this is open to the world, vulnerable and easily affected and possessed by outside forces, natural or supernatural, although the distinction itself is not easily made, since only gradually does an actual "natural" evolve. Following Max Weber, Taylor uses the term, "disenchantment" to describe the dismantling of this social imaginary, by science and the Enlightenment, industrialisation and so on. In the process the self becomes "buffered", no longer vulnerable to the power of forces beyond the self. He no longer fears demons and thunderstorms and, more radically, they no longer exist for him. He possesses his own selfhood: even God is displaced as he becomes his own centre, with boundaries, social and metaphysical. Self-consciously, we are aware of the magical past, and we count ourselves lucky to have won through. We call the past "backward" and assume we have progressed.

In this account, the modern self is a secular one, deriving causation from scientific accounts, which are intelligible to the mind, which therefore, in a sense, remains emperor of its own experience.

This modern, buffered self is precisely the subjectivity the Gothic tale of the doppelganger seeks to question, showing that the buffers do not work. Taylor even argues that the buffered self deals with the power of desires and passions by denying them the religious meaning they once enjoyed, so that they are reduced to the status of bodily functions to be dealt with rather than being daimonic. It is his desires for forbidden pleasures that lead Jekyll to create Mr Hyde and thus deal surgically with an inconvenience.

This is not a religious conception of identity. For Augustine of Hippo in his fifth-century Confessions, desires need to be ordered but potentially desire itself leads to God, as in the famous line: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Only a divine object can satisfy the power of desire.

The language of singularity, of "wholeness", only appears in the most recent liturgy, as an index of Christian decadence. Traditionally, the Christian self was a conflicted and dynamic subjectivity, and expressed in relation to a communal, wholly "porous" reality. St Paul is the architect of the flesh/spirit distinction, which is not, as is often assumed, a body/spirit dualism. The "flesh" Paul speaks of is not the body but the pull of all that enmeshes us in our selfish ego: anger and envy and ambition as well as sexual desires. "My sin," says Dorothy Sayers's Eve in one of her festival plays, "was intellectual".

Sin is being subject to forces within and without: it is a bad form of relationality and the answer is the society of the virtues, in which Christ clothes the self. The medieval play Everyman presents a kind of psychomachia, that is a play about the internal struggle of the soul. But it does so in terms of societies and characters who influence and accompany the soul for good or ill: beauty, good deeds and fellowship. In medieval Christianity the seven deadly sins and their opposing virtues were characters to put on and be lived. To be a Christian was to "put on" Christ, to dress up in his garments and share in his persona.

Nor, in the tradition, are Christians merely dual: saint and sinner. Their soul, Augustine believed, was a vestige of the Trinity, in its triple powers of memory, understanding and will. These derive from their Creator, and the long journey of the Confessions is the tale of the prodigal son, in which memory, ordered through the understanding, leads the will of Augustine to conversion in a story which is that of every believer. Augustine's understanding of the soul as vestige of the Trinity was hugely influential throughout the Middle Ages. Potentially, therefore, Christianity has an understanding of the self as dual or triple, or multiple, a relational subjectivity, which finds its selfhood in union with Christ and his body the church. Human beings are works in progress, and sites of a divine drama, wholly relational and porous.

While we live we shall always be self-divided. As St Paul wrote: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil that I would not, that I do." And in showing us the darkness of the double self the Gothic, for all its horror and terror, tells us the truth: we are all Cain and Abel: "the whole seed of Adam, not divided/ But fearfully joined in the darkness of the double self". But this duality is our hope and not our despair

English Literature No 4

'Frightful pleasure' - how 'Gothic' is The Changeling?

Nigel Wheale asks how fair it is to describe The Changeling, with all its 'horrid' bloody actions, as Gothic, defining the key elements of Gothic in the process.

Middleton and Rowley surely intended to shock their audiences when De Flores - the deflowerer? - hacks off the ring-finger of his dying victim, Alonzo, in order to present a diamond to his mistress. This gratuitously bloody detail, after all, is not present in the original source for The Changeling. It's a lurid and violent action, committed in an obscure corner of a fortress, but can it properly be described as 'Gothic'?

What is the Gothic?

The Gothic as a literary genre is conventionally understood to date from the mid-18th century, 140 years later than the period of Jacobean drama, and can be seen as a reaction against the ideals of the Enlightenment. Gothic works, by this strict definition, almost exclusively took the form of prose fiction, a deviant sub-genre of the novel, and were the creations of a radically different culture compared to that of the early 17th century. Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764), published under a pseudonym, is generally credited as the first Gothic novel. Walpole claimed that his fantasy was in fact translated from an Italian text of 1529, which gives it some kind of relation to The Changeling, in its imaginative context at least.

Taste for this Gothic fiction peaked during the 1790s, when the fad was adroitly mocked by Jane Austen in Northanger Abbey (written 1798, published 1818). Her heroine, Catherine Morland, is promised at least a dozen 'Gothics' to read, and she is desperate to know, 'are they all horrid? Are you sure they are all horrid?' (Chapter 6). Austen probably intended 'horrid', in its original sense of 'hair-raising', to mean 'shocking'.

Aspects of this first, literary Gothic phase were too compelling not to be developed by numerous later authors, as in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847) and Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897). But in our own 21st century, 'Gothic' has become one of the dominant mood-boards, particularly in popular culture, and in film and TV above all: Buffy, Lestat, Hogwarts and Zombie Apocalypse haunt our airwaves, if not our dreams. It's even a 'lifestyle choice', cutely accessorised for Goths and all the Emo/tional souls.

Conventional literary-critical definitions of 'the Gothic' therefore did not apply this category to the Renaissance period, though the 18th century had begun to read Shakespeare's plays as works of 'Gothic' genius (but in a slightly different sense). So when we think about Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's The Changeling, (earliest known performance 4 January 1623/4, published 1653), as a Gothic work, we are creatively re-reading a pre-Gothic text through our contemporary cultural perspective and concerns.

The cult of the Gothic was in part a reaction against the rational clarities and scientific secularism pursued by the idealists of the European Enlightenment - Newton, Descartes, Voltaire and the

female participants of the salon discussion-groups. Perversely, the Gothic imagination revelled in apparitions and the supernatural, it indulged violent passions and obsession:

Gothic styles disturb the borders of knowing and conjure up obscure otherworldly phenomena or the 'dark arts', alchemical, arcane and occult forms Botting

Thinking of The Changeling in Gothic Terms

The most compelling characters of early Gothic fiction tended to be evil, villainous individuals, generally male, who made any virtuous, heroic characters seem insignificant by contrast. Gothic texts were also frankly amoral, not concerned to abide by conventional ethical norms, but rather to flout them; they were fixated by the unnatural and the monstrous. Given this broad paradigm for a Gothic text, it is not difficult to see how Middleton and Rowley's Jacobean revenge tragedy might be recruited to the later cultural template.

Powerfully irrational passions create the tragedy of The Changeling - but then what would be a 'rational passion'? Beatrice-Joanna is consumed by her inexplicable hatred for De Flores, her father's servant:

This ominous ill-fac'd fellow more disturbs me Than all my other passions.

There is no explanation for this dominating phobia; certainly, De Flores is ill-favoured, and a mere servant, but

Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude, I tumbled into th'world a gentleman.

A psychological explanation for Beatrice-Joanna's strong feelings might argue that she recognises in De Flores' character something of her own amoral nature, an ethical ugliness that, following common Renaissance beliefs, is expressed in De Flores' physical features. Beatrice-Joanna knows, unconsciously, according to this kind of argument, that she shares a deep bond with De Flores, and so will be inevitably drawn to him, for all that she appears to resist. De Flores knows as much:

Look but into your conscience, read me there, 'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal:

Tomazo, the brother of Alonzo, Beatrice-Joanna's intended husband, quickly detects a new coolness and distance in his brother's fiancée -

did you not mark the dullness of her parting now?

Alonzo is oblivious to this change in his beloved, and Tomazo despairingly exclaims,

Why, here is love's tame madness.

Madness and irrationality, those counter-Enlightenment states, consume and destroy the protagonists of The Changeling.

The Bedlam Sub-plot

The comic sub-plot introduces Antonio 'The Changeling', who feigns madness in order to gain the affections of Isabella, wife of Alibius, the doctor in charge of the fools and madmen in his 'bedlam'. Thomas Rowley is generally credited with the 'Bedlam' sub-plot, and the opening and closing scenes in the play. Antonio's wooing of the young, restive Isabella parallels and works as a commentary on De Flores' passion for Beatrice-Joanna. Antonio pleads with Isabella,

In your eyes I shall behold mine own deformity, And dress myself up fairer 3.3.185-7

Both Antonio and De Flores have to overcome their outward 'deformed' appearances to gain their loves. This comic subplot is thought to have appealed to audiences for The Changeling, before the London theatres were closed in 1642, performing as a successful, crowd-pleasing entertainment. But from the perspective of a Gothic reading of the play, these parallels between the mismatched lovers demonstrate the dangerous crossover between rational and irrational behaviours.

Antonio is named 'The Changeling' of the play as listed in the Dramatis Personae, but 'changefulness' was a troubling concern throughout Renaissance culture. As Franciscus, Isabella's

second, poetical lover, writes to her, the sun 'Shapes and transshapes, destroys and builds again', governing the mutability of people and their circumstances. Therefore, Beatrice-Joanna may be the true changeling of the tragedy, as her passions drive her from Piracquo to Alsemero, and finally to De Flores. The 'dumb show' of Madmen, at the centre of the play, is a chilling demonstration of the fluid and irruptive passions within us all, as they

act their fantasies in any shapes Suiting their present thoughts ... all As their wild fancies prompt 'em.

Lollio, the warden of this Bedlam, knows exactly what is going on, and his comment explicitly connects the parade of madmen and the covert love-making between Tony and Isabella:

'tis too much for one shepherd to govern two of these flocks', one mad, the other foolish

Revenge Conventions Anticipating Gothic Style

As The Changeling moves to its tragic climax, conventions of Jacobean revenge drama that anticipate the Gothic style take control of the plot. The lengthy, silent spectacle at the opening of Act 4 was a well-established device in Jacobean theatre, but the apparition of Alonzo's ghost to De Flores, in the midst of his smile, startles him, showing him the hand whose finger he had cut off

could be a scene from any number of late 18th-century 'horrid' Gothic romances.

Similarly, Alsemero's elaborate scheme to test Beatrice-Joanna's virginity, which seems to have been Middleton's own invention, also anticipates the Gothic genre's obsession with 'the 'dark arts', alchemical, arcane and occult forms' (Botting). The risky substitution devised by Beatrice-Joanna, where her maid Diaphanta (enthusiastically) takes her mistress's place on the first night of her wedding to Alsemero, also has a bizarre, Gothic ingenuity. But again, the 'bed trick' or lovers' exchange had been deployed in many dramas from late 16th century onwards, as in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure.

Thomas Middleton was a keen student of Shakespeare's dramas, and collaborated closely with him on several plays; Middleton is thought to have revised Macbeth, a tragedy directed by supernatural powers that clearly lends itself to Gothic interpretations and production. Middleton gave De Flores his unprepossessing features, and Shakespeare's Richard III and Iago may also have contributed to the role. When we creatively re-read a play such as The Changeling through our own, contemporary assumptions, we should also remember that what appear to us as 'Gothic' meanings or effects may have been created by very different, pre-Gothic assumptions.

https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine/articles/15747