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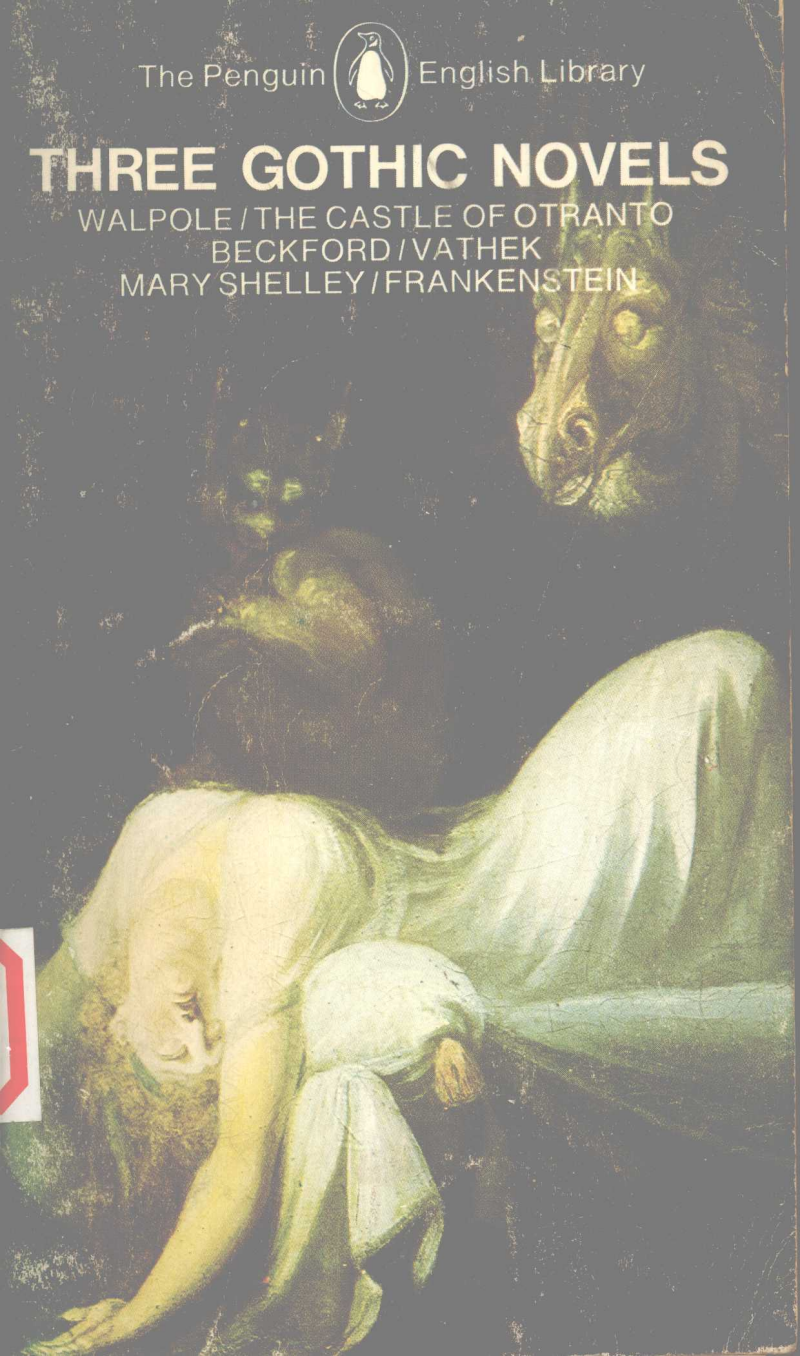
English Library

# THREE GOTHIC NOVELS

WALPOLE / THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

BECKFORD / Vathek

MARY SHELLEY / FRANKENSTEIN





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EDGAR ALLAN POE  
SELECTED WRITINGS

EDITED BY DAVID GALLOWAY

*And much of Madness and more of Sin  
And Horror the Soul of the Plot*

The lines from 'Ligeia' epitomize the familiar Poe, the arch-priest of Gothic horror, author of 'The Masque of the Red Death' and 'The Pit and the Pendulum'. That Poe, unquestioned master of 'the Grotesque and Arabesque', is fully represented here, but the volume also includes generous selections from his poetry and critical writings. Together they amount to a portrait of a complex personality, that of a conscious aesthete, the most exotic of American writers, who was at the same time keenly engaged in an astonishing variety of interests. Nor are the 'Grotesque' tales the simple manipulations of terror that they seem; David Galloway's introduction reveals their author as a profoundly serious writer, whose investigations of extreme states of consciousness have a particular relevance for our time.

## THREE JACOBEOAN TRAGEDIES

EDITED BY GĀMINI SALGĀDO

Renaissance humanism had reached a crisis by the early seventeenth century. It was followed by a period of mental unrest, a sense of moral corruption and ambiguity which provoked the Jacobean dramatists to embittered satire and images of tragic retribution.

John Webster (c. 1570–1625) in *The White Devil* paints a sinister and merciless world ruled by all the refinements of cunning and intrigue, whilst in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, one of the most powerful of the Jacobean tragedies, Cyril Tourneur (c. 1570–1626) displays in a macabre ballet the emotional conflicts and vices typical of the age. *The Changeling* is perhaps the supreme achievement of Thomas Middleton (1580–1627) – a masterpiece of brooding intensity.

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HERMAN MELVILLE

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EMILY BRONTË  
WUTHERING HEIGHTS

EDITED BY DAVID DAICHES

'Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone.' So Emily Brontë appeared in the eyes of her sister, Charlotte. Her one novel, *Wuthering Heights*, published a year before her death in 1848 at the age of thirty, similarly stands alone as perhaps the most passionately original work in the English language. This dark, unforgettable story of Catherine Earnshaw and the swarthy Heathcliff 'is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath', and Emily Brontë records the progress of their love with such truth, imagination, and emotional intensity that a plain tale of the Yorkshire moors acquires the depth and simplicity of ancient tragedy.

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THREE GOTHIC NOVELS

MARIO PRAZ retired in 1966 from his position as Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Rome. He has written a great many books on literature, many in English.

PETER FAIRCLOUGH teaches English in Lancashire. He has also edited *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* for the Penguin English Library.





THREE **Gothic** NOVELS

*Edited by Peter Fairclough  
with an Introductory Essay by  
Mario Praz*

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THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

*Horace Walpole*

VATHEK

*William Beckford*

FRANKENSTEIN

*Mary Shelley*



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Published in Penguin English Library 1968  
Reprinted 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1978 (twice)

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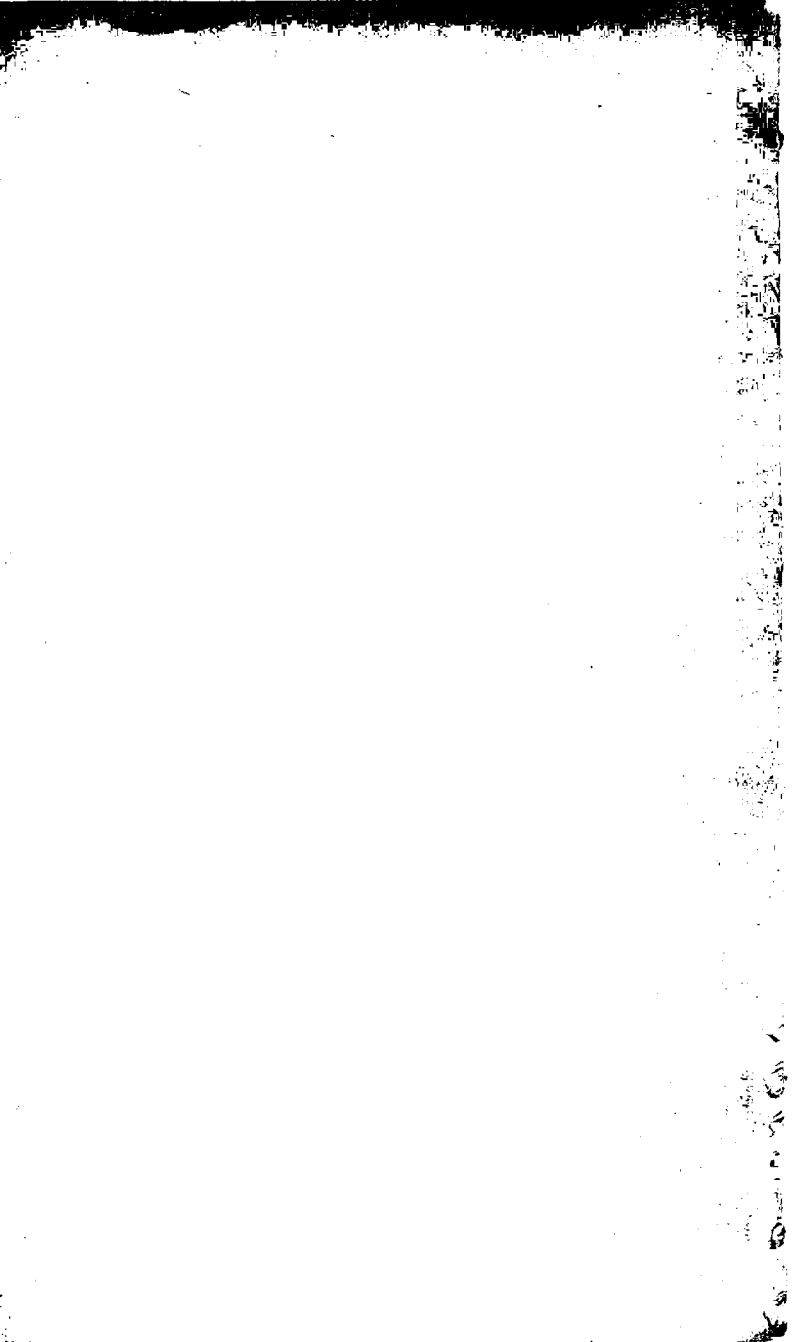
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## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

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THE favour recently enjoyed in some European countries (Italy for instance) by Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* makes one wonder whether the scanty fare provided by modern experimental novels and *anti-romans* has made readers so famished, that as soon as they happen to detect the smell of what the French romantics used to call the *roman-charogne*, they rush for it like mad. The terror and wonder which abound in those two novels have certainly profited also by the example of modern masters, but a reader familiar with the Gothic novels of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century will easily recognize in them themes and proceedings which were the stock-in-trade of the tales of terror. The terrific robot of the modern Prague banker is of the same lineage as Mary Shelley's monster, and the underground labyrinth through which the protagonist reaches the awesome room of the dark Jewish school is a commonplace of the Gothic tales, the double is a descendant of many a German *Doppelgänger*, the motif of the innocent accused and tried for a crime he has not committed, and incapable of proving his innocence, recalls episodes in *Frankenstein*, in *Melmoth the Wanderer* and in François Soulié's *Mémoires du diable*. In fact, though refined by the lesson of the later masters of the mysterious and the cruel, such as Kafka in fiction and Kubin in painting, the subject-matter of *The Golem* has such a distinct Gothic flavour that 'tracing its literary genealogy would take us very far, because on the one hand there is the Rosicrucian strain which begins with Godwin's later novels and gains in strength through Hawthorne's posthumous work, on the other hand there are Novalis's

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romanticism, certain inventions of Hoffmann (such as *Der Sandmann*), Jean Paul (such as *Der Komet oder Nikolaus Markgrat*), Arnim and Brentano, Balzac's and Gérard de Nerval's esoteric novels, etc.<sup>1</sup> And in the posthumous work of the Russian novelist there is a devilish cat who descends from Hoffmann's Kater Murr, a man who lacks a shadow like Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl, besides obvious echoes of Goethe's *Faust*, of Gogol, and the Wandering Jew.

All this shows that the Gothic flame, as an Indian scholar has called it,<sup>2</sup> is far from extinguished. The appeal of terror and mystery no doubt existed also much earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century, witness the Hellenistic romances and the Elizabethan dramas, but it is in the last portion of that century that in fiction we meet with no less strange fashions than those of the *merveilleuses* and the *incroyables* of the Directory, which historians of costume quote as typical instances of the extravagant finery that usually either accompanies or follows epochs of great social revolutions. Thus about the time of the French Revolution there appeared in France the series of infernal novels of the Marquis de Sade, and in England a whole blossoming of Gothic novels, called tales of terror there and *romans noirs* abroad. The effect, in a survey of literary history, is not unlike the impression we receive in an air journey over Texas and New Mexico to the Grand Canyon, when we see a level plain suddenly interrupted by chains of craggy mountains, with rocks which have the aspect of ruined castles and ranges of convulsed peaks like a tumultuous barbaric horde.

And in the same way as such a full orchestra of the horrid

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1. Elémire Zolla's introduction to the Italian translation of *The Golem*, Milan, Bompiani, 1966.

2. Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame*, Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England, London, Arthur Barker, 1957; second edition, New York, Russell and Russell, 1966.

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is announced by sporadic growths of strangely misshapen hills and grim outposts, so the novels of terror were announced by less fierce forerunners. An aesthetic theory of the Horrid and the Terrible had gradually developed in the course of the eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but why in the most polite and effeminate of centuries, in the century of *bergeries* and *fêtes galantes* and idyllic conversation pieces, the century of Watteau and Boucher and Zoffany, should people have begun to feel the horrible fascination of dark forests and lugubrious caverns, and cemeteries and thunderstorms? The answer is: just because of its feminine character. In no other century was woman such a dominating figure, the very essence of rococo being a feminine delicacy – just because of this the eighteenth century had *les nerfs à fleur de peau*. They discovered the *mal de vivre*, and the *vapeurs*. '*Les vapeurs, c'est l'ennui*,' said Madame d'Épinay. They had vague inklings of a metaphysical anxiety. Throughout her life Madame du Deffand experienced the oppressive feeling of an ultimate nothingness: '*Je suis tombée dans le néant . . . je retombe dans le néant*'.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the origin of the painful pleasure imparted by the tales of terror is contained in two lines of Baudelaire ('*Au lecteur*' – *Les Fleurs du Mal*):

*C'est l'Ennui! – L'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire  
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.*<sup>5</sup>

The new sensibility had begun to find literary expression in compositions such as Collins's *Ode to Fear* and in *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Walpole as the whim of a dilettante mediaevalist; it had modified the conception of

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3. Symptoms of this taste for the Horrid have been studied by D. Mornet, *Le Romantisme en France au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Hachette, 1912, ch. I, *Les premiers remous*, III, *Les grands ébranlements de l'âme*.

4. 'I fell into a void . . . and I am falling back into a void.'

5. Boredom – His eye filled with unwilling tears

He dreams of scaffolds as he smokes his hookah.

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the Beautiful in Burke's famous *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), where there occurs the startling statement: 'Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible . . . is a source of the sublime';<sup>6</sup> it had sought to analyse its own origins in such essays as that of J. and A. L. Aikin 'On the Pleasure derived from Objects of Terror', and the 'Enquiry into those kinds of Distress which excite agreeable sensations' (in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose*, London, 1773) and in Drake's essay 'On Objects of Terror' which precedes the fragment of *Montmorenci*. The discovery of Horror as a source of delight reacted on men's actual conception of Beauty itself: the Horrid, from being a category of the Beautiful, became eventually one of its essential elements, and the 'beautifully horrid' passed by insensible degrees into the 'horribly beautiful'.

Of course, as I was saying, the discovery of the beauty of the Horrid cannot be considered as belonging entirely to the eighteenth century, although it was only then that the idea came to full consciousness. That beauty and poetry may be extracted from such unpromising materials as the base and the repugnant, Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans had known long before this, though they did not theorize about it. In Lewis's *The Monk*, Agnes who, being with child, has been condemned to a slow and hideous death in a dungeon together with her offspring, says:

Sometimes I felt the bloated toad, hideous and pampered with the poisonous vapours of the dungeon, dragging its loathsome length along my bosom. Sometimes the quick cold lizard roused me, leaving its slimy track upon my face and entangling itself in the tresses of my wild and matted hair. Often have I at

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6. For the effects of the new sensibility on the visual arts, see David Irwin, *English Neoclassical Art*, London, Faber, 1966, p. 135 ff., and Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 11-19.



### Introductory Essay

waking found my fingers ringed with the long worms which bred in the corrupted flesh of my infant.

These details, on which the *frénétique* romantics of a later date were to set store, where did Lewis find them but in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (IV, i, 77 ff.)?

O . . . rather than marry Paris

. . . bid me lurk

Where serpents are; chain me with roaring bears  
Or hide me nightly in a charnel-house,  
O'er cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,  
With reeky shanks, and yellow chapless skulls,  
Or bid me go into a new-made grave  
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud . . .

and in Otway's *The Orphan* (I, 209 ff., 446 ff.):

When in some Cell distracted, as I shall be,  
Thou seest me lye; these unregarded Locks,  
Matted like Furies Tresses; my poor Limbs  
Chain'd to the Ground, &c.

On the other hand, the idea of pain as an integral part of desire had a certain novelty, if Novalis could remark (in *Psychologische Fragmente*): 'It is strange that the association of desire, religion and cruelty should not have immediately attracted men's attention to the intimate relationship which exists between them, and to the tendency which they have in common.' Novalis's *Fragments* appeared in 1798 in the *Athenäum*, one year after the publication of the definitive and complete edition of Sade's *Justine* and *Juliette* which had for the first time appeared respectively in 1791 and 1796.

A monster or a martyr, Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade was certainly not the first to be endowed with an exceptional outlook on erotic matters, but the *siècle des lumières* supplied him with the torch of reason and the belief in the soundness of Nature's laws, and the newly undertaken exploration of the customs of primitive peoples who lived according to Nature made it clear to him that