

"The Gothic Horror genre is devoted to more than just stories of horror, the fantastic, and the darker supernatural forces".

Gothic fiction was first established as a genre in 1764 and since then it has flourished and branched off into many different subgenres. Despite being over 200 years old, the genre still maintains popularity due to the way its elements appeal to the audience. Genres are defined by their specific features, called conventions, which are used by composers to engage their readers. The Gothic Horror genre is distinguished not only by conventions of horror, the fantastic, and the darker supernatural forces but also emotionally disturbed characters, the exploration of real societal fears and unspoken desires. The Tell-Tale Heart, by Edgar Allan Poe (1843), and Frankenstein, written by Mary Shelley (1818), are both texts that use these Horror conventions to distinguish their writing and engage the audience by evoking emotion in the reader.

The theme of insanity is used in the Gothic Horror genre to evoke sympathy and disgust from the reader. Composers convey insanity by including emotionally disturbed and insane characters in their stories, particularly unreliable narrators. Edgar Allan Poe writes The Tell-Tale Heart from the first person point of view and uses the technique of an unreliable narrator. In the text, the narrator openly denies his insanity saying "*Can you not see that I have full control of my mind?*" This rhetorical question contradicts his behaviour in the rest of the story, so the reader can determine that the narrator is lying and likely to be telling his story inaccurately. Poe uses this unreliable narration to convey insanity in his text. The reader may be disgusted at the character's manic actions or show some concern for his emotionally disturbed state. On the other hand, throughout Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the narrators give reliable accounts of the story. However, whilst the narrators may seem reliable, this does not exclude any insanity, particularly with the events of the story being based around a doctor who steals parts of corpses for the purpose of reanimating them. Victor Frankenstein's deeds are certainly not heroic, but they aren't always heinous either. His character is persistent to complete his objective, all while battling overwhelming madness. After creating his monster, Frankenstein rushes away, "*Unable to endure the aspect of the being I [he] had created...*" This statement shows the remorse he felt for his actions, reminding the audience of his humanity and encouraging them to empathise with him. Evoking sympathy is a technique used to engage the reader and make the story more interesting. Both Poe and Shelley write about emotionally disturbed characters to interest their readers and portray the Gothic convention of madness and insanity in Frankenstein and The Tell-Tale Heart.

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As well as themes of horror, the fantastic and the darker supernatural forces, many of the events in the Gothic Horror genre have a basis in real societal fears. By writing stories that readers can relate to, Gothic Horror authors are able to evoke much deeper emotions, such as fear. The Tell-Tale Heart is the story of a cold-blooded murderer so it is doubtful that readers would immediately relate to him. Even so, if they considered it, they might find that they actually have more in common with the narrator than they think. In the text, the narrator attempts to justify why he murdered the old man: *"When the old man looked at me with his vulture eye a cold feeling went up and down my back; even my blood became cold."* The author uses a metaphor to describe the character's hatred for the eye which can see so much. It can be assumed that the narrator must have something to hide from the eye and his only hope is to kill its owner. In society, privacy is important as it allows people to have control over who they share their thoughts, feelings and actions with. In this modern age, with so much technology readily available, there are always new theories about how much this privacy can be invaded without anyone realising it. These doubts and theories are forever in the back of reader's minds, and writing a text that taps into such a fear is an ingenious way to engage the audience. Similarly, in Frankenstein, Shelley writes about scientific exploration. Her story is set around Dr Victor Frankenstein giving life to his own creation. Despite working determinedly to create his monster, he later describes how that night, *"I [he] started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed..."* The author uses this description to show the extent of Frankenstein's horror and allow the audience to relate by reminding them of similar occasions in their own lives. Science has come a long way since Shelly created Frankenstein over 100 years ago, particularly in the field of medicine. New research, experimentation and testing are continually happening to improve the treatments we have and create new ones. Humans are naturally curious about life but they have also learnt to be cautious, so advances in science often scare us when we are reminded of the threats that each new discovery could hold if it became out of control. With this in mind, Shelley has used a real societal fear effectively in her writing to evoke a deeper reaction from the audience. The Tell-Tale Heart and Frankenstein are just two examples of how Gothic Horror texts are distinguished by evoking emotion in the reader through real societal fears.

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In Gothic Horror texts, unspoken ideas are often used to encourage the audience to think deeply about what they are reading. Desire is an unspoken idea that underlies many of these stories and affects how the events of the story play out.

In Frankenstein, Shelley writes about Frankenstein's desire to 'play god' in a quest for forbidden knowledge about the creation of life. This is evident in chapter three: *"So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation."*

Frankenstein had a deep desire to achieve something that had never been done before. The consequences of his actions eventually got out of control, and many of the following events of the story could have been prevented if Frankenstein's hungry desire to create life had been contained. Edgar Allan Poe also writes about desire in The Tell-Tale Heart. In the story, the narrator claims *"...it was not the old man I felt I had to kill; it was the eye, his Evil Eye."* This revelation may cause the reader to question why the narrator went to such a great extent to murder a man who he says he loves. The narrator had an all-consuming desire to kill the eye and therefore felt it was a success when he had completed his self-appointed duty, with apparently no regard for the old man's life. None of the events in The Tell-Tale Heart would have occurred if the narrator had not become absorbed by his murderous desire. The unspoken idea of desire is used by Shelley and Poe to control the plots of both Frankenstein and The Tell-Tale Heart. These Gothic Horror authors use this convention skillfully to engage the audience and create drama in their stories.

While the Gothic Horror genre does feature stories of horror, the fantastic, and the darker supernatural forces, it is not limited to these conventions. The Tell-Tale Heart, by Edgar Allan Poe (1843), and Frankenstein, written by Mary Shelley (1818), are both Horror texts that use the additional conventions of emotionally disturbed characters, the exploration of real societal fears and unspoken desires to engage the reader effectively and distinguish their writing as part of the Gothic Horror genre.