

## **AT2 Genre Study: Gothic Horror – Sam Rivett 8ENG4**

“Gothic horror texts do more than keep the reader in suspense; they create fear.” Discuss the ways that composers use language to instil fear in the responder. Refer to two or more texts you have studied in class.

Gothic horror texts are known for their shocking, haunting, and thought-provoking characters, settings, and plots. They not only keep the reader in suspense; they also create fear in the reader by playing on natural human anxieties such as the fear of predation, the fear of catastrophes, and the fear of contagion. The fear is created by the descriptive language and other language techniques used by the author, as well as the actions and dialogue of the characters. Two exemplary novels of the gothic horror genre are Bram Stoker’s 1897 *Dracula* and Mary Shelley’s 1818 *Frankenstein*.

The fear of predation is the fear of being killed by a predator. In *Dracula*, the antagonist, Count Dracula, is a vampire from Romania who is trying to move to England in order that he can have new blood to satisfy his lust for it. Count Dracula is also known as Count de Ville, which could be a play on the word ‘devil’. Stoker used descriptive language in his novel, and this enables the reader to vividly picture the Count. The protagonist, Jonathan Harker, describes the Count saying, “The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood...[he had] deep, burning eyes...set amongst swollen flesh...”. In addition to descriptive language, Stoker used other language techniques to emphasise the monstrosity of the Count. He used similes, with Harker saying the Count “...lay like a filthy leech...”. He used hyperbole when Harker sees the Count and says he “...filled my very soul with horror”. In addition, he used imagery; Harker says the Count is an “...awful creature...simply gorged with blood”. The use of descriptive language and other language techniques creates an image for the reader of a monster that kills people for their blood. It is frightening and appeals to the reader’s fear of predation.

A second human fear common to the gothic horror genre is the fear of catastrophes. A catastrophe can be something natural yet disastrous, or it can be a deliberate action that goes wrong, the latter of which occurs in *Frankenstein*. In this text, the protagonist, Dr Victor Frankenstein, is on a quest to create life so that he can discover the secrets of life and death. He initially succeeds; he creates life. However, it is not the beautiful life he intended to create, and he subsequently realises the gravity behind what he has done and the horror that he has created. Shelley used descriptive language to describe Frankenstein’s Monster. Frankenstein says of his creation, “His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath...[he has] watery eyes...[he has a] shrivelled complexion and straight black lips”. Frankenstein’s creation was his dream, but it becomes a nightmare. He says, “...the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart”. Not only is Frankenstein disgusted

with how the monster looks. He is disgusted with himself for wasting his time. He says, "For this I had deprived myself of rest and health". Frankenstein's despair creates fear in the reader. His despair is relatable; not because of what he has created but because everything has gone so wrong. The reader is not only scared of and horrified by the monster, but is scared for Frankenstein. The reader is afraid of the unfolding catastrophe.

The fear of contagion is yet another human fear that is commonly written about in texts in the gothic horror genre. It is the fear of the spread of disease. Two creatures that are frequently used to represent this fear are zombies and vampires, with the latter featuring in *Dracula*. In this novel, Stoker used the technique of showing, not telling. Stoker hinted that something is not quite right in his description of Lucy. He described through the narration of Harker who says, her breathing is "...stertorous...", and the appearance of her gums is "...pale...", while her eyes are "...dull and hard...", and her voice is "...voluptuous...such as I had never heard from her lips...". Stoker did not explicitly tell the reader what the problem is; action and dialogue inform the reader instead. As Arthur bent over to kiss Lucy, Van Helsing "...swooped upon [Arthur]...catching him by the neck with both hands...and actually hurled him almost across the room". The reader feels how desperate Van Helsing is to stop Arthur from kissing Lucy, and therefore, to stop Lucy from spreading disease, the vampire curse, to Arthur. Stoker used exclamation marks to emphasise Lucy's enticing voice, "Arthur! Oh my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!". Exclamation marks are also used to emphasise Van Helsing's desperation. After he has stopped Arthur, he says, "Not on your life! ...not for your living soul and hers!" Another language technique Stoker used is a simile. He showed the reader how scared Van Helsing is and how ignorant Arthur is to the immediate danger he is in. Van Helsing stands between Arthur and Lucy, "...like a lion at bay". An atmosphere of suspense and dread is created in *Dracula* using the fear of contagion, and is shown through the actions and dialogue of the characters.

*Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley are two well-recognised novels from the gothic horror genre. Like other texts of the genre, each novel draws upon common human anxieties to tell a story and to create fear in the reader. The fears of predation, catastrophes, and contagion feature in these stories along with shocking, haunting, and thought-provoking characters, settings, and plots. The language techniques used by the two authors, in addition to the descriptive language used by them, as well as the actions and dialogue of the characters, further serve to bring the reader into horrifying worlds. As he or she reads each of these books, the reader both eagerly wants to know what will happen next, and yet, fearfully, does not want to know. As exemplary texts of the gothic horror genre, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* keep the reader in suspense. Even more than that; they also create fear.