The adjective **Gothic** in the 18th century indicated what was **mediaeval**, and was opposed to **classical**: the classical was clear, simple and balanced, modern, harmonious, elegant and civilized, whereas the Gothic represented excess, the wild, the barbarous and primitive, the rude, the dark. After the middle of the century it came to acquire a positive connotation, in accordance with the change in cultural values. Sentiment began to substitute satire, mystery supplanted rationalism. This accompanied the general tendency – common to many European countries, notably Germany – to revalue the past, seen as possessing a vigour, a spontaneity which had long been forgotten. The mediaeval revival found a very important contribution in the publication of Thomas Percy’s famous *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1763), namely a collection of poems that he had found in an old folio manuscript volume.

In architecture ‘Gothic’ refers to the style typical of the period between the 12th and the 16th centuries. Gothic buildings – especially cathedrals and abbeys – were characterized by pointed arches and windows, and tall pillars (famous examples are Cologne cathedral and Notre Dame in Paris). This style appealed very much to 18th century public taste, to the point that many artificial ‘Gothic’ mansions were built in imitation of mediaeval architecture.

Owing to the cultural background which was emerging, the term ‘Gothic’ was used to indicate a group of novels – written between the 1760s and the 1820s – which had the following features in common: interest in the non-rational experience; elements of horror; the supernatural; mediaeval touches, like Gothic ruins or castles full of secret passages and hiding places, aimed at improving the picturesque quality of a landscape. Dark monasteries and ghosts contributed to create an atmosphere of mystery. The characters tended to be stereotypes: the heroine was usually a shy, helpless young woman, in the hands of a cruel man, the ‘villain’. The villain was indeed the main attraction of Gothic novels. Cruel and cynical, he was, however, often handsome and irresistible, while a halo of mystery around him or a secret in his past contributed to render him even more fascinating.

This kind of novel was based on the **theory of the sublime**.

‘Sublime’ was called a state of intense emotion, often connected with terror. The theoretical background of this connection was provided by Edmund Burke in his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). Burke was convinced that feeling was much more powerful than reason:

“[ ] Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the idea of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible subjects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling”.

The **vision of nature** upset by terrible storms, the devastating power of hurricanes and volcanoes, high rocks, chasms, also contributed to create a sort of terror which, purified, would turn into the sublime.

Italy often provided a favourite setting for these novels, as well as Northern Europe. The Middle Ages, or past periods were considered the most suitable.

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The philosopher **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) in France was against the rationalism of the classical age, and advocated a return to nature. In Germany the **Sturm und Drang** movement (second half of the 18th century) strongly reacted against the rules of classicism in the name of popular culture, and opened the way to imagination, feeling, originality. The **Sturm und Drang** rediscovered the greatness of Shakespeare, who came to be considered the genius par excellence.
THE FIRST GOTHIC NOVELS

The novel, which is regarded as the originator of Gothic fiction is *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole in 1764. In the preface to the second edition the author explained that he intended to combine the fantastic and the real, the imaginative quality of the old romance and the imitative nature of the modern novel, but in fact it is the fantastic that gives the book its hallmark and challenges the rational world of the Enlightenment. The Castle of Otranto established the vogue of medievalism and enjoyed vast popularity; it was praised by writers like George Byron and Walter Scott.

Anne Radcliffe (1764-1823) was the most famous of Gothic novelists. She made use of exotic landscape and historical atmosphere to write stories of great suspense. Her novels contain all the ingredients of the genre, but in the end the supernatural incidents receive a rational explanation. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) presents a young woman under the power of a nasty guardian, the wicked Montoni. *The Italian* (1797) deals with a fiendlike monk during the Inquisition. In spite of the great popularity that they enjoyed, Mrs Radcliffe’s novels –and their readers- could not avoid criticism, and became the object of the elegant satire of the clear-sighted, rational Jane Austen. *Northanger Abbey*, published 1818, probably written twenty years earlier) presents two young girls completely dominated by interest in Gothic readings:

“[...] Have you gone on with Udolpho?”

“Yes, I have been reading it ever since I woke; and I am got to the black veil”.

“Are you, indeed? How delightful! Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are not you wild to know?”

“Oh! Yes, quite; what can it be? –But do not tell me- I would not be told upon any account. I know it must be a skeleton, I am sure it is Laurentina’s skeleton. Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. [---]”

(from Chapter 6)

When information on new books is required, the anxious question is: “... but are they all horrid, are you sure they are all horrid?”. One of the two girls has a vision of life distorted by her reading of sensational Gothic novels, to the point that, when she is invited to some friends’ family home –an old abbey- she expects to find the atmosphere and the events of her favourite books, and is gently teased by one of her friends.

Northanger Abbey

‘How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment? – And what will you discern? – Not tables, toilets, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the remains of a broken lute, on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open, and over the fire-place the portrait of some handsome warrior, whose features will so incomprehensibly strike you, that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it. Dorothy meanwhile, no less struck by your appearance, gazes on you in great agitation, and drops a few unintelligible hints. To raise your spirits, moreover, she gives you reason to suppose that the part of the abbey you inhabit is undoubtedly haunted, and informs you that you will not have a single domestic within call. With this parting cordial she *curseys off* – you listen to the sound of her receding footsteps as long as the last echo can reach you – and when, with fainting spirits, you attempt to fasten your door, you discover, with increased alarm, that it has no lock’.

‘Oh! Mr Tilney, how frightful! –This is just like a book!- But it cannot really happen to me. I am sure your housekeeper is not really Dorothy. –Well, what then?’

‘Nothing further to alarm perhaps may occur the first night. After surmounting your un conquerable horror of the bed, you will retire to rest, and get a few hours’ unquiet slumber. But on the second, or at farthest the third night after your arrival, you will probably have a violent storm. Peals of thunder so loud as to seem to shake the edifice to its foundation will roll round the neighbouring mountains – and during the frightful gusts of wind which accompany it, you will probably think you discern (for your lamp is not extinguished) one part of the hanging more violently agitated than the rest. Unable of course to repress your curiosity in so favourable a moment for indulging it, you will instantly arise, and throwing your dressing gown around you, proceed to examine this mystery. After a very short search, you will discover a division in the tapestry so artfully constructed as to defy the minutest inspection, and on opening it, a door will immediately appear -
which door being only secured by massy bars and a padlock, you will, after a few efforts, succeed in opening, - and, with your lamp in your hand, will pass through it into a small vaulted room'.

‘No, indeed; I should be too much frightened to do any such thing’.

‘What! Not when Dorothy has given you to understand that there is a secret subterraneous communication between your apartment and the chapel of St Anthony, scarcely two miles off - Could you shrink from so simple an adventure? No, no, you will proceed into this small vaulted room, and through this into several others, without perceiving any thing very remarkable in either. In one perhaps there may be a dagger, in another a few drops of blood, and in a third the remains of some instrument of torture; but there being nothing in all this out of the common way, and your lamp being nearly exhausted, you will return towards your own apartment.

(from Chapter 20)

It was not only the ‘barbarous’ Middle Ages that appealed so much to late 18th century writers and readers. The East also fascinated the minds of people, surrounded as it was with its halo of mystery. It provided the setting for Vathek, a fantastic oriental novel written in French by William Beckford between 1781 and 1782, and successively translated into English. It tells of an Arabian caliph who pursues wealth and power and finally sells himself to the devil. This strange romance combined the exotic charm and the mystery of the East with the Gothic trend, thanks to the horror and shock produced by the powers of evil.

The highest pitch of horror was reached in The Monk (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis (“Monk” Lewis). This novel, which shows the influence of German literature in the use of dream imagery, contains daring sexual passages and attempts to explore the unconscious mind. It also shows predominance of the supernatural.

The emotion of fear, especially nameless fear, is very effectively handled in Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) and The Fatal Revenge (1807), two novels that made Charles Robert Maturin another master of the Gothic. The theme of the Wanderer Fascinated several poets of the Romantic period; its sources can be traced back in the Bible and in several European literatures. The element of nameless fear present in these two novels prefigures Edgar Allan Poe.

Frankenstein

Of all the novels in the Gothic trend one which has greatly impressed the readers and fired their imagination is Frankenstein (1818). This book is much more than a ‘horror story’. On the one hand, it testifies of the interest in scientific experiment which was spreading quickly, but it also explores the theme of the ‘double’; moreover, it poses a dramatic question, which still holds nowadays: the moral responsibility of the scientist when his discoveries go beyond his capacity of control, i.e. when he finds himself exploring the limits of human knowledge.

“Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow”.

(from Chapter 4)

Frankenstein was written by Mary Godwin, the young daughter of the philosopher William Godwin, and wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The novel has a complex narrative structure. It is written in form of letters by the Captain of a ship to his own sister. In his letters the narrator tells the story of a strange man he has rescued during a voyage to the North Pole. The man – Victor Frankenstein- is taken aboard the ship and one day, not long before dying, tells the Captain his story.
He is a scientist from Geneva, Switzerland. Fired with the lessons of one of his university professors, he passionately devotes himself to scientific studies, or natural philosophy, as he calls it. What intrigues him most is the mystery of the origin of life, and finally he does discover “the cause of generation and life”. He builds a creature, assembling various parts that he takes from the bodies of dead people, and manages to instil the spark of life into it. To his amazement, the creature begins to breathe and opens his eyes, but looks so hideous that Frankenstein, terrified, escapes.

The monster wanders about the country, at first full of curiosity and benevolence, but is soon disappointed and wounded by the horror and hostility with which people react at the sight of him.

He lives in total solitude and, simply by observing a family who inhabits a small cottage, learns to speak and then to read. But again his horrible aspect frustrates his attempts at making friends. “Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding” he will confess later in the book (Chapter 24). The utter desolation of his life is unbearable to him, and he soon begins to hate his maker who has abandoned him to his fate. He asks the scientist to give him a female companion. At first Frankenstein agrees, but then considers the terrible implications of making a second monster and propagating “a race of devils”, and destroys the new being on which he is working. From that moment on the scientist’s life is a nightmare. The creature persecutes him and kills those that he loves. Frankenstein’s only aim is to destroy the creature, but he dies, consumed by the slow agony of his grief. The creature mysteriously arrives and, on seeing his ‘creator’ dead, is overcome by despair and will finally seek death.

At first scripted in agreement with the original, Frankenstein was revised to appear more horrifying. The abandonment of Mary Shelley’s concerns set the pattern for Frankenstein films for several decades. Here you can compare Robert de Niro in a version of the Nineties and Boris Karloff in a version of the Thirties.

TASKS

1. Here below you find three passages from the book. Read them, and choose for each the appropriate presentation from those provided at the end. Then state who is speaking in each passage.

TEXT A

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? 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 lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep.

(d from Chapter 5)

TEXT B

As I could not pass through the town, I was obliged to cross the lake in a boat to arrive at Plainpalais. During this short voyage I saw the lightnings playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures. The storm appeared to approach rapidly; and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain coming slowly in large drops, but its violence quickly increased.

I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. It was echoed from Sâl eve, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy; vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant every thing seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the eye recovered itself from the preceding flash. The storm, as is often the case in Switzerland, appeared at once in various parts of the heavens. The most violent storm hung exactly north of the town, over that part of the lake which lies between the promontory of Belrive and the village of Copêt. Another storm enlightened Jura with faint flashes; and another darkened and sometimes disclosed the Môle, a peaked mountain to the east of the lake.

While I watched the tempest, so beautiful yet terrific, I wandered on with a hasty step. This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my hands and exclaimed aloud, 'William, dear angel! this is thy funeral, this thy dirge!' As I said these words I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could he be (I shuddered at the conception) the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; my teeth chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree for support. The figure passed me quickly, and I lost it in the gloom. Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child. He was the murderer! I could not doubt it.

(from Chapter 7)
“I continued to wind among the paths of the wood, until I came to its boundary which was skirted by a deep and rapid river, into which many of the trees bent their branches, now budding with the fresh spring. Here I pause, not exactly knowing what path to pursue, when I heard the sound of voice, that induced me to conceal myself under the shade of a cypress. I was scarcely hid when a young girl came running towards the spot where I was concealed, laughing, as if she ran from someone in sport. She continued her course along the precipitous sides of the river, when suddenly her foot slipped, and she fell into the rapid stream. I rushed from my hiding place and with extreme labour from the force of the current, saved her and dragged her to shore. She was senseless, and I endeavoured by every means in my power to restore animation, when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic, who was probably the person from whom she had playfully fled. On seeing me, he darted towards me, and tearing the girl from my arms, hastened towards the deeper parts of the wood. I followed speedily, I hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired. I sank to the ground, and my injurer, with increased swiftness, escaped into the wood”.

“This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and as a recompense I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone. The feelings of kindness and gentleness which I had entertained but a few moments before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind. But the agony of my wound overcame me; my pulses paused, and I fainted”.

(from Chapter 16)

Presentation a
Frankenstein receives a letter from home informing him that his younger brother William has been murdered. He goes to Geneva immediately, but must spend the night at a village nearby, because the gates of the town have already been shut. There is a terrible storm.

Presentation b
Frankenstein meets the creature who urges him to hear his tale. Thus the scientist learns of the rebukes and humiliations that the monster receives from the humans.

Presentation c
After years of study, feverish activity, exaltation and doubts, the crucial moment has arrived. Frankenstein realizes that his aim has been fulfilled, but it is not a triumph for him.

2. The complete title of the book is *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Moreover, Frankenstein suggests the myth of Faust. Discuss what justifies these associations.
THE FORTUNE OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

The popularity of the gothic novel was destined to continue with time; it found imitators in various countries and periods, and took up different trends.

The aspects of the fantastic and supernatural, the sense of mystery and terror, all found an ideal ground in many Romantic writers. The vision of Nature upset by terrible storms, the grandeur of mountaineous landscapes, the abyss, produced the same fascinating terror which is the basis of Gothic literature.

GERMANY

In Germany, the Gothic trend was congenial to the eclectic and original personality of the most important narrative writer of the romantic period, Ernst Theodor Amadeus (E.T.A.) Hoffmann (1776-1822). Writer, musician, painter, he was a man of profound and wide culture, fond of the esoteric and the occult, who tried to explore the regions of the unconscious. Hoffmann exploited the visionary and horrific aspects of the Gothic novel, to which he added the motive of the ‘double’, or ‘Doppelgänger’, which was very popular in the German Romantic movement.

Hoffman’s life and works inspired a fantasy opera, Les contes d’Hoffmann, which was put to music by Jacques Offenbach 1819-1880.

His famous Gothic story Die Elixiere des Teufels (The Elixir of the Devil), inspired to some extent by M.G. Lewis’s The Monk, is built on a motive dear to the author: the split personality. The setting is the 18th century, but the atmosphere recalls the Middle Ages. A friar, Medardo, one day feels the scent of a diabolic elixir, which is the wine with which the devil tempted St Anthony. This scent charms him and gives him strange visions. Medardo is sent to Rome and, during the journey, has strange adventures. During one of them he sees the apparition of a monk –his own image- in his room during the night. The apparition disturbs him so much that he loses his reason. The weird feeling of a split ego will never abandon him.

The motive of the double and the split personality is already prefigured in Frankenstein, where the monster might represent a sort of reflection of certain aspects of his creator, and will inspire writers like Edgar Allan Poe (The Fall of The House of Usher), R.L. Stevenson (Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, The Master of Ballantrae), Oscar Wilde (The Picture of Dorian Gray), Joseph Conrad (The Secret Sharer), Henry James (The Turn of the Screw), and the Russian Fedor Dostoevski (The Gambler).

THE USA

Another writer who, under the influence of the Gothic trend, exploited the fantastic, the mystery, the atmosphere of hallucination is the American Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), one of the most intriguing personalities of the literary world, who appeals so much to the young generations.

Poe was indebted to Hoffmann for the interest in the supernatural, and in his turn powerfully influenced European writers, notably Baudelaire in France and the aesthetes in England. What is significant in Poe is his capacity to intensify terror through a subtle and powerful narrative technique, and the astonishing combination of symbolism and supernatural events related with great wealth and precision of details.

The Fall of the House of Usher is one of his most significant stories, under this respect. What makes it more intriguing is the fact that the reader is constantly divided between believing that the narrator has really witnessed supernatural events, and considering the same events as the fruit of a deranged mind (a similar technique is used by Henry James in The Turn of the Screw).

The story is about a young man -the narrator- called to visit a dying friend, Roderick Usher. Usher lives with his twin sister, Lady Madeline, in a mansion pervaded by a mysterious and frightening atmosphere.

“...I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages...”.

Both brother and sister are very ill, and Madeline soon dies. Roderick and the narrator place her body in the coffin in a vault without openings, closed by a heavy iron door.
One night there is a terrible storm. The narrator feels a sense of anguish and oppression; at a certain point Roderick appears, bearing a lamp.

The narrator tries to comfort Roderick reading some pages from one of his favourite romances. He has the impression that, among the noises produced by the storm, a “cracking and ripping sound” echoes in the distance. At a certain point Roderick is prey to indescribable terror.

‘Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet I dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them – many, many days ago – yet I dared not – I dared not speak! And now – to-night – Ethelred – ha! ha! – the breaking of the hermit’s door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangour of the shield! – say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh where shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? MADMAN!’ here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul – MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS OUT OF THE DOOR!”
As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell – the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed, threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust – but then out of these doors there DID stand the lofty and shrouded figure of the Lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber, and from that mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued; for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting, and blood-red moon which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind – the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight – my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘HOUSE OF USHER’.

SPAIN

A gothic flavour, and namely the influence of both Poe and Hoffmann can be traced in the Leyendas, short stories written by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870). They are pervaded by an atmosphere of haunting mystery, often tinged with terror, as in the case of El Monte de las Ánimas.

The story takes the idea from an old popular legend according to which, on the night of All Souls’ Day, the Templars and the nobles from Castilla rise from their tombs and wander about the mountain where they died in a bloody and fierce battle. The mountain is therefore called “El monte de las ánimas” and nobody dares to go there on that night. A proud and capricious girl, Beatriz, wants to try the courage of her lover, requesting him to go and fetch a blue ribbon that she has forgotten on the terrible mountain. During the night she hears strange, frightening sounds, and has the feeling that someone is moving in her bedroom.

El Monte de las Ánimas

Y cerrando los ojos intentó dormir... pero en vano había hecho un esfuerzo sobre sí misma. Pronto volvió a incorporarse más pálida, más inquieta, más aterrada. Ya no era una ilusión: las colgaduras de brocado de la puerta habían rozado al separarse, y unas pisadas lentas sonaban sobre la alfombra; el rumor de aquellas pisadas era sordo, casi imperceptible, pero continuado, y a su compás se oía crujir una cosa como madera o hueso. Y se acercaban, se acercaban, y se movió el reclinatorio que estaba a la orilla de su lecho. Beatriz lanzó un grito agudo, y arrebujándose en la ropa que la cubría, escondió la cabeza y contuvo el aliento.

El aire azotaba los vidrios del balcón; el agua de la fuente lejana caía y caía con un rumor eterno y monótono; los ladridos de los perros se dilataban en las ráfagas del aire, y las campanas de la ciudad de Soria, unas cerca, otras distantes, doblaban tristemente por las ánimas de los difuntos.

Así pasó una hora, dos, la noche, un siglo, porque la noche aquella pareció eterna a Beatriz. Al fin despuntó la aurora: vuelta de su temor, entreabrió los ojos a los primeros rayos de luz. Después de una noche de insomnio y de terrores, ¡es tan
herself, a light and white sun! She separated the silk curtains of the bed, and was about to laugh at her past fears, when suddenly cold sweat covered her body, her eyes rolled back, and a mortal pallor whitened her cheeks. She had seen the blue band, torn in the mountains, the blue band that Alonso had gone to search.

When her servants arrived, terrified, to inform her of the death of her eldest son of Alcudiel, who the morning before had been devoured by the wolves among the thickets of the Mountain of the Souls, they found her motionless, in spasm, clinging with both hands to one of the ebony columns of the bed, her eyes rolled back, her mouth open, her lips white, her limbs stiff, dead; dead of horror!

IV

They say that after this event, a lost hunter who passed the night of the dead without being able to leave the Mountain of the Souls, and who, the next day, before dying, was able to relate what he had seen, related terrible things. Among others, he assured that he saw the skeletons of the old Templars and the nobles of Soria buried in the atrium of the chapel rise up at the moment of prayer with a horrible noise, and, knights on the skeletons of horses, pursue like a beast a beautiful, pallid, and disheveled woman, who with bare feet and bloody, and screaming in horror, circled the tomb of Alonso.

THE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE GOTHIC NOVEL

Alongside the Gothic, and rather from it, the trend of the vampire developed in the 19th century. It is interesting to note that a short story of this kind, The Vampire, was written in 1819 by John William Polidori, Byron’s friend and personal doctor. The most famous vampire is Dracula, by the Irish Bram Stoker (1847-1912). The figure of the vampire has features in common with the Gothic villain: he is elegant, fascinating, but also cynical and outside the rules of society.

Horror and love of the supernatural did not exhaust their appeal with the end of the 19th century. Just to mention the most famous names, writers like Howard Philip Lovecraft (1890-1937) and Stephen King (1946-), both American, are the authors of stories centered on horror, the challenge of the unknown and anguish, which enjoy vast popularity nowadays.

CONCLUDING TASKS

1. Of all the ingredients used by writers to convey horror, which do you consider the most effective? (Class discussion).

2. With the advent of the cinema and the sophisticated achievements in technology, how can a Gothic story be made more impressive?

3. In groups, choose an episode of the stories here presented, and decide how to make it into a film. You should consider the impact of factors like scenery, costumes and make-up, sound effects, background music. Which parts of the text can be substituted by audio-visual elements? And which must be kept?
COMPOSITION

Horror stories seem to appeal very much to younger generations. If you share this interest, make up groups of three or four and plan your own short horror-story. Decide in which historical period to set it, the number of characters, the basic facts, and choose the devices to use in order to render it horrifying. The composition can be completed as a group work project, or finished individually at home. The students who are critical of horror stories coulds similarly produce a mock version in the line of Northanger Abbey.