



## Three Gothic Novels : The Castle of Otranto ~ Vathek ~ Frankenstein

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(Introduction)*

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The Gothic novel, that curious literary genre which flourished from about 1765 until 1825, revels in the horrible and the supernatural, in suspense and exotic settings. This volume, with its erudite introduction by Mario Praz, presents three of the most celebrated Gothic novels: *The Castle of Otranto*, published pseudonymously in 1765, is one of the first of the genre and the most truly Gothic of the three; in its blending of two kinds of romanticism, ancient and modern, it is a precursor of Romanticism. *Vathek* (1786), an oriental tale by an eccentric millionaire, exotically combines Gothic romanticism with the vivacity of *The Arabian Nights*, and is a narrative *tour de force*. The story of *Frankenstein* (1818) and the monster he created is as spine-chilling today as it ever was; as in all Gothic novels, horror is the keynote.

The cover shows a detail from *The Nightmare* by J.H. Fuseli.

## **Three Gothic Novels : The Castle of Otranto ~ Vathek ~ Frankenstein Details**

Date : Published December 28th 1983 by Penguin Books Limited (first published 1968)

ISBN : 9780140430363

Author : Peter Fairclough (Editor) , Horace Walpole , William Beckford , Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley , Mario Praz (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 505 pages

Genre : Classics, Horror, Gothic, Fiction, Fantasy, Literature, 18th Century



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## **From Reader Review Three Gothic Novels : The Castle of Otranto ~ Vathek ~ Frankenstein for online ebook**

### **Sasha says**

"But alas! my lord, what is blood? what is nobility? We are all reptiles, miserable sinful creatures. It is piety alone that can distinguish us from the dust whence we sprung, and whither we must return." - Friar Jerome - The Castle of Otranto

"and he succeeded better as his generosity was unbounded and his indulgences unrestrained: for he did not think, with the Caliph Omar Ben Abdalaziz, that it was necessary to make a hell of this world to enjoy Paradise in the next." - Vathek

"for nothing contributes so much to tranquilize the mind as a steady purpose - a point on which the soul may fix it's intellectual eye." - Frankenstein

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### **Catherine Chapman says**

Review of 'The Castle of Otranto' - 'Entertainingly warped morality'

I began reading this book as research for a Regency romance I was writing that contained references to Gothic novels. I realised although I thought I had the concept of a Gothic novel, the ones I've read previously ('Frankenstein' and 'Wuthering Heights') are deemed Gothic by virtue of their narrative structure, rather than the actual content. 'The Castle of Otranto' would, I thought, be a 'proper' Gothic novel.

Well, initially I thought I wouldn't persevere with it as the start is just ridiculous but I began to find the story strangely compelling and the characterisation and dialogue very funny. The problem I find in reviewing this book is that I couldn't take it seriously - I think it's hard for a modern Western reader to entertain the notion that the author's intention in writing this book could ever have been serious.

What I loved most about 'The Castle of Otranto' was the warped morality. The story centres around Manfred's decision to divorce his current wife and marry a younger woman. Manfred is just an egotistical brute but it's very funny when the narrator's voice intervenes -quite frequently- to assure us that Manfred isn't really that bad! Also, the total lack of speech marks or paragraphing to indicate who's speaking just adds to the comedy of reading the story as you often get lost in the dialogue.

Overall, I'm awarding 3 stars because I found the book entertaining. If you're inquisitive about the Gothic novel and you're not intent upon taking 'The Castle of Otranto' too seriously, it's worth a read.

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### **Helen says**

I have read all these three stories and all of them are really great. I definitely recommend this book!! Besides, all three of them are very significant. The Castle of Otranto is considered to be the very first (official) Gothic story every published (1764). The Gothic genre officially starts with its publication. A very entertaining book with all the characteristics of the so-called "first" or classic Gothics which were published by the hundreds from 1790 until about 1820. Vathek: an exotic Gothic which keeps your interest alive until the very end. And what more to say about Frankenstein? Such a dear, such a loved book!!

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### **Kate says**

Actually 3 1/2 stars as a sort of average for the three books in this anthology.

Castle of Otranto: Pretty awesome. One commenter described it as being kind of Shakespearean, and I agree - you can enjoy it as if Shakespeare decided to sit down and write a haunted house novella. You can see the very beginnings of modern horror tropes here (panicked servants seeing things, ancestor in the portrait comes to life, etc.), but you also get all of the classic (melo)drama of lit. from this time period (star-crossed love, true heir in disguise, accidental and tragic stabbings...) Fun to read.

Vathek: Less awesome. Hence not 4 stars for the anthology. So many eunuchs. So racist. I guess I knew where it was going (reaching for more knowledge than man is meant to have is never good. all fictional characters should stop trying), which is fine, but I wasn't interested enough in how the Caliph got there, so the middle kind of lagged. Also, remember for class - bees can be Muslim? (page 238)

Frankenstein: Also pretty awesome, although I didn't reread it. The point of reading this anthology now was to get ahead for this fall, but I've read this one a lot. And taught it this past fall. So I think we're good.

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### **Jessica Hausheer says**

Frankenstein was really interesting, but when I got to the last page I flipped over expecting one last chapter because Shelley just left me hanging.

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### **Amy says**

#### **THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO: 5 stars**

So beautiful!! It was breathtaking, riveting and exciting. And the atmosphere was the beauty of a true Gothic novel. All the characters were rich and clearly defined; I personally loved Isabella the most. However, the ending wasn't properly resolved :( I would have liked to have seen what happened a while after (SPOILER!)..... Matilda's death.

But it was gorgeous! LOVED it! I have been wanting to read this forever, and it didn't disappoint.

#### **VATHEK: 2 stars**

It was very hard to read and had a very rich vocab (well, by rich I mean I couldn't understand it very well, lol). It was also very dark and rather satanic, but it was ok...I'd wanted to read Vathek for ages, and I can't say I'm disappointed because I honestly didn't know what to expect. But there were parts that made me cringe and it just got a bit too...dark.

**FRANKENSTEIN:** 5 stars.

I simply loved it. I've been wanting to read this masterpiece for ages, and I wasn't disappointed. Beautiful descriptions, vivid and creative characters, and a terrifying monster whose anguish almost made me cry. The pain he inflicts on the humans around him as well as the murders he commits really tugged at my heart strings; I found Elizabeth and Clerval's deaths so sad :(

It was brilliant.

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### **Matt says**

For class, we only read Vathek, but I have read Frankenstein several other times already. I'll have to go back and read The Castle of Otranto when I have a chance. As for Vathek, it's a pretty good story, if you can get through the antiquated style.

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### **Ignacio Senao f says**

**El castillo de Otranto (3/5):** Mucha gente la pone a parir, esto se debe a que no la consideran una obra de mediados del siglo XVIII, la leen como algo actual. Es buena, pues en tan pocas páginas trata temas como: amor, intriga y terror. A pesar de que es algo caótica por momentos el hecho de tener tan pocos personajes es fácil seguirla. La extraña muerte del único heredero del castillo el día de su boda impuesta con una princesa obligada. Ruidos extraños y armaduras que se mueven. Un señor del castillo que sólo quiere su beneficio cueste lo que cueste, y un extraño personaje que aparece cuando se le necesita.

**El espectro del castillo (3/5):** muy parecida a la anterior, pero contada para ser desarrollada en una obra de teatro. Decir que es del autor de la magnífica "El Monja", sólo por esto se sabe de su calidad antes de leerse.

**Zastrozzi (3/5):** la busca desesperada por matar a alguien cuyo motivo desconocemos, el alguien se libra por los pelos de ser asesinado. Cada vez la situación de vuelve más inverosímil y las coincidencias son esplendidas a favor del lector.

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### **Kat TheBookoholic says**

Saved but the story of Mary Shelley "Frankenstein", this collection of gothic novels introduces the Gothic genre from its first steps. The Castle of Otranto starts with the most promising qualifications just to disappoint the reader with its mild ending. The narrative style and vocabulary were simple and not of my taste while Frankenstein shouted out Percy Shelley to specific parts. The narrative, especially by the point of view of the monster was excellent, mostly interesting and emotionally moving. The vocabulary and writing style were spontaneous, emotional and welcoming.

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### **Si Barron says**

Frankenstein I have already read and reviewed.

Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is an early piece of gothic. The story is highly melodramatic with bevies of swooning maidens, over-wrought heroes and plotting baddies. The writing is highly 'tell don't show' and as such gets somewhat tiring. Also none of the speech is laid out on modern lines (new line; speech marks) so it's sometimes confusing as to who says what.

There are some supernatural elements but these tended to fall away as the narrative progressed- some of the spooky events (such as the walking painting) had no real purpose to them but added to the atmosphere. It's an interesting period piece but doesn't hold up as a thrilling read in this age.

*Vathek* is more easily comprehensible- it actually reads quite a bit like a *Conan the Barbarian* story with extravagant landscapes and improbable palaces, luxury, decadence, terror and despair- yup, all the good ingredients. There isn't a great deal of structure to the plot we just ramble on from one scene of outrage to the next in company with the irrepressible *Vathek*. There are definite shades of Lovecraft, Howard and other 20th century masters of the macabre within.

(in fact after reading through Wikipedia it reminded me of Lovecraft's 'Dream Quest of Unknown Kaddath' which is very similar in tone

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### **Jenn says**

For me *Frankenstein* was painful. Mostly because I felt like Dr. Frankensein was crazy for even wanting to make the monster in the first place. I also had a hard time with the romantic writing, perhaps this is something that I could appreciate better now but I failed to see why we needed the description of the beautiful mountains just as the monster was getting angry and about to do something interesting.

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### **Tearlach says**

This review is only for *The Castle of Otranto* and *Vathek*, because I intend to read *Frankenstein* at a later date, at my own leisure, with plenty of time for reflection.

I'm beginning to realise that it's hard for me to rate Gothic fiction, because I read it for fun. Even when I can't appreciate plot or characterisation, I appreciate the atmosphere, the air of mystery and terror. That's definitely the case with *Otranto*.

*Vathek*, on the other hand, is just overall bad. I'm not even sure it should *count* as Gothic because the setting is entirely wrong, and there's just no sense of impending doom. The characters are ridiculous rather than ominous, and I lost interest in the story multiple times.

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### **Ashley Owens says**

This book has been sitting on my "currently reading" shelf since November because I keep forgetting to move it!

This was one of the first books I started in my "gothtober" reading month, and I didn't end up finishing it

until a couple of days after Halloween.

While I loved "Castle of Otranto," I have to say that most of "Vathek" was boring and went over my head. I'm sure there was profound imagery and metaphor there, but I just did not absorb any of it. "Castle" was excellent though. I guess it's called the original work of gothic fiction by many, and that makes me even more impressed with it. I could totally see where all of the gothic tropes we know came from based on this book. It was very well done. A bit predictable, but that's just because I've read his type of book before. It is still original, despite me having figured out many of the plot points. The whole thing was cold, dark, and moved quickly.

"Frankenstein" was a re-read for me and I enjoyed it this time as much as I did the first time I read it! I actually may have even liked this reading of it better because the first time I read it was for a class in college and it was a completely analytical read.

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### **Andrew Barger says**

I have only finished the first book: The Castle of Otranto. The layout of this book was bad. Without the use of quotes or some other notation, it was difficult at times to understand who was speaking. The text also runs together with few paragraph breaks in an apparent effort to save pages. As for the story, I was disappointed on its lack of Gothic descriptions. I expected more from the original Goth novel.

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### **Janellyn51 says**

The Castle one was kind of interesting, you have to kind of get into a rythym with the language and then it goes a bit faster. It's almost more a comedy of errors. Manfred was a complete cretin, sneaky and gross, The horror part of it to me, wasn't where the gigantic helmet or other body parts came from, it was the idea that Manfred then thought he would marry Isabelle, as if! And the daughter, why she didn't hang herself, I'll never understand! Vathek, I didn't care for that much. He was like a cross between Ludwig the swan king and his lavish castles, and fantasy land, and the creepy character in Joyce Carol Oates, The Accursed, and his version of hell. Anyway, it wasn't something I could get into that much. Frankenstein, now that was interesting, and you certainly shouldn't think that because you've "seen the film" you know the story, because it doesn't bear the vaguest resemblance to Mary's book. It sounds like Mary would have been content to have it be a short story, which came about one stormy night on the lake in Geneva with Lord Byron and Polidori, but, Shelley talked her into fleshing out the story. I found the part where the monster is beginning to become conscious of being conscious interesting, sight blurry at first gradually coming into focus, hearing, putting two and tow together. It is an interesting question, should Victor have created a female for the monster? The monsters logic, when he made his case, was sound, and although he'd murdered, you could still sympathize with how he felt about his loneliness and not hard to believe that he would happily have gone to another country and lived happily ever after. But then, Victor wasn't off in wondering if he did create a woman for him, she might be a creep and reek havoc, and if they procreated? Well, Victor was a smart guy, did he not get all he had to do on that account was not give her a uterus!!!! Anyway, I'm glad I read it.

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