

# THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

## EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

### Gothic Literature, artist & writers with a focus on:

#### Writers and key texts:

Mary Shelley	1797-1851	Frankenstein pub. 1818
Susan Hill,	1942-	Woman in Black pub. 1983
Angela Carter	1940-1992	The Bloody Chamber pub. 1979
Bram Stoker	1847-1912	Dracula pub. 1897

#### Artists:

William Holman Hunt	1827-1910
Ford Madox Brown	1873-1939
Dante Gabriel Rossetti	1783-1854
John Everett Millais	1829-1896
J.W Turner	1775-1851
Salvator Rosa	1615-1673

Other references *could* include Jane Austen 'Northanger Abbey', M.R. James 'Oh Whistle and I'll come to you my Lad', Wilkie Collins 'Moonstone', Emily Bronte 'Wuthering Heights'.

Extended session, selected art and artefacts from some of the following galleries: China and Far East, Egypt, Greece and Rome, Italy and Spain.

*Please note that our paintings are sometimes on loan so please do contact us for current works on display.*

#### Key Stage 3 and 4

This is one of our DIY sessions designed for teachers to use as a self-led gallery session. It has been devised for English literature Students at Key stage 4, with an emphasis on the A' Level exam theme 'Gothic Literature' on WJEC Language and Literature and OCR Literature.

It includes some key historic dates, ideas about social and political events of the time and encourages students to think about how these related to and influenced these artists and writers. The session extends into the legacy the Gothic left for those emerging in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As we do not know your students these ideas may need adapting, but we hope that they will act as a springboard. Each idea relates to specific art works and offers student interactions or teacher prompt questions written in italics. Included in these gallery session sheets are a list of key writers and artists and their dates

When you are talking in front of the painting, or any work of art in the Museum, be very careful not to touch it yourself. Also, as the students sit down in front of the painting, make sure that they can all see the painting – the gallery lighting can make this difficult if the students sit too close.

## **Aims of session**

- To put the world of the Gothic writers into a context with their visual artist contemporaries; thus giving students a broader understanding of the arts in this period.
- To highlight specific key historic, social and political events, and how these influenced artists of the day.
- To demonstrate the relationships between artists and writers.
- To further students critical and creative thinking in response to visual artists and ideas.
- To deepen an awareness of artistic legacies.

## **Themes**

- The Sublime
- Exaggeration and extremes
- Horror and Pleasure
- Dualism, The Id and The Ego
- Exploring the forbidden
- Sex, fear and pleasure
- Science and progress – Darwin – ‘The Origin of Species’ and ‘The Descent of Man’
- Science of the mind – Freud and Jung
- Industrialisation
- Nature and Nurture

## Walk upstairs to Gallery 7

Ask students to think about the art in these galleries; particularly the subject, style and 'atmosphere' of the work. These notes suggest *themes* and *literature links* in *italic*.

**Setting the scene.** Many artists explored subjects that were in later times to be termed 'Gothic' this atmospheric painting by the Italian artist Salvator Rosa certainly sets the tone in its theme of mortality. It may be worth mentioning that works by earlier writers and artists certainly were known and may have offered inspirational starting points for their own work, in particular M.R. James who held a post here at the Fitzwilliam Museum.

### Salvator Rosa            L'Umana Fragilita (Human Frailty)    1656



In 1655 a devastating plague swept Naples. Salvator Rosa's son, Rosalvo, his brother, his sister, her husband and five of their children, all died. The transience of human life was a recurring theme in 17th Century painting and thought, but for Rosa, in the year he made this painting, the subject had a tragic immediacy. A letter to his friend Ricciardi makes clear the effect this multiple bereavement had upon him: "This time heaven has struck me in such a way that shows me that all human remedies are useless and the least pain I feel is when I tell you that I weep as I write."

Ask your students to find the visual symbols that express his grief and reflection on 'Human Frailty'. In particular look for bubbles, fireworks (unknown human life span) The Hippopotamus (chaos and disorder), Terminus the God of Endings, the fish (death and hatred), Death as a winged skeleton.

*Themes:* Death and love

*Suggested literature links:* Mary Shelley 'Frankenstein' (1818), Emily Bronte 'Wuthering Heights' (1847)

## Gallery 2

John Everett Millais,

Cherry Ripe (1879)

on loan



This painting proved to be extremely popular and over 50,000 prints were made. Millais may reference the English song 'Cherry Ripe' written by poet Robert Herrick (1591-1633) and later set to the music of Charles Edward Horn (1786-1849) which contains the refrain,

Cherry ripe, cherry ripe,

Ripe I cry,  
Full and fair ones  
Come and buy.  
Cherry ripe, cherry ripe,  
Ripe I cry,  
Full and fair ones

Come and buy

Popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the song is also mentioned in George Eliot's 'Middlemarch' (1871).

In this original painting Millais employs painterly skill to produce an image of great tenderness. To our more cynical 21<sup>st</sup>-Century eye it may seem overly sentimental and perhaps hint of something slightly unsettling, but this is very much of Victorian taste and is described as a 'Fancy Painting'. Childhood mortality rates were high and most families had suffered the tragic loss of a child. Millais wished to show an image of *innocent wisdom* often associated at the time with childhood. Here the young girl is set amongst nature. She has a contemplative expression yet sits neatly at the edge of the unknown worlds of spirits, fairies and other worldliness hinted at in the dark woods behind her. The Grimms' 'Fairy Tales', English edition, were recently translated and fed an audience eager for the rather gruesome fairy tales (although the English translations were a diluted version!).

**William Holman Hunt**

**The Birthday on loan**



The young woman depicted in this portrait is Edith Waugh the second wife of Hunt and the younger sister to his late first wife Fanny Waugh, who had died in Italy during child birth. At this time in England it was illegal to marry your deceased wife's sister so Hunt and Edith married in secret whilst abroad, this caused lasting tension with their families. The painting was made to celebrate Edith's birthday but is imbued with references to Fanny and has an air of memorial rather than celebration. Edith is shown holding an array of objects laden with symbolism: roses (true love), timepieces (mortality), peacock feathers (eternal life and remembrance) coral and amber (protection from illness).

*Themes:* Séances, The Occult, Moralism, Good versus Evil, Religion and the Occult, Love and Death

*Suggested literature links:* M.R. James 'Oh Whistle and I'll come to you my Lad' (1904), Susan Hill 'The Woman in Black' (1983), Emily Bronte 'Wuthering Heights' (1847)

**Alfred Elmore**

**On the Brink P.DI08-1975**



A young woman sits illuminated by moonlight on a window ledge. Behind her a shadowed figure of a man whispers to her. At her feet a torn betting slip indicating that her time spent at the casino behind her has left her indebted. What is the man proposing? How will she resolve her situation? What is her fate? This Victorian moralistic painting serves as a cautionary tale to young people on the many dilemmas that face them and that wise decisions can determine your future well-being.

*You may wish to explore narratives from this point onwards, what does this young woman decide to do what is her future story? Or you might like to offer to simple answers to explore – she either says “yes” or “no” to the man....*

*Theme:* Sex and gender, Fate and free will

*Suggested literature link:* Thomas Hardy 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles', (1892)

**John Everett Millais**

**The Twins**

**PD.36-2005**



Painted in 1876 as a commission by the artist's paint and supplies manufacturer Hoare of his identical twin daughters Kate and Grace.

*Ask students to consider how the different characters of the girls are represented by their clothing and expression and the objects around them. Why might twins be a curiosity in this era? Discussions around identity and image of the individual.*

*Themes:* Dualism, the 'other self'. – Self portraits/portraits

*Suggested literature link:* Oscar Wilde 'Dorian Grey' (1890)

**JW Turner**

**Beechwood with Gypsies**

**P.D24-1981 and P.D25-1981**



This intriguing painting explores the dark woods and among the trees you can just make out a group of people, a gypsy encampment with their cooking fire.

*You could ask your students to explore a creative narrative about this scene, who has come across this gathering? What happens next? Why are they in the woods?*

*This painting is a good starting point for descriptive creative writing and poetry.*

*Theme:* untamed nature, otherness, man and nature, superstition and magic, prediction and fate.

*Suggested literature links:* George Elliot 'Mill on the Floss' (1860), Charlotte Bronte 'Jane Eyre' (1847), Victor Hugo 'The Hunchback of Notre-Dame' (1831)

Other paintings in this gallery include various small landscapes.

**Ford Madox Brown**

**Cordelia's Portion**

**P.D9-1950**



In this painting by Ford Madox Brown he depicts the opening scene of Shakespeare's play 'King Lear, A tragedy'. Here we see King Lear, seated centrally, as he divides his kingdom of Albion into portions according to how much each of his three daughters profess to love him, and from this moment King Lear's life begins its descent into chaos.

Ford Madox Brown can also be explored in his biographical painting 'The Last of England'. Here he shows his fellow artist and friend Thomas Woolner as he embarks on emigration with his young wife Alice Waugh (sister of Holman Hunt's first and second wives ref. 'The Birthday') 'The last of England' is a self-portrait of Madox Brown and his second wife Emma and their child. Madox Brown had a tragic start to his life with the loss of his sister in childhood and then the death of his first wife to consumption after only a brief marriage. His second wife Emma suffered fragile mental and physical health.

*Theme:* Extreme emotions, sanity and stability, dispossession

*Suggested literature link:* Shakespeare 'King Lear' (1606)

### Dante Gabriel Rossetti

### Joan of Arc

### No.685

*Theme:* Fascination with the Arthurian legend and Medieval chivalry, re-enacting the past.

*Suggested literature links:* Chaucer 'A Knight's Tale, Pilgrims Progress' and 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', 14<sup>th</sup> Century Epic. Alfred Lord Tennyson 'The Lady of Shallot' (1881)

Romantic Poetry and Paintings with Arthurian themes. E.g. John William Waterhouse 'The Lady of Shallot' (1880) Tate Collection, London.

### Extended visit suggestions:

#### Gallery 31 Armoury

Armour and Weapons - executioner's sword (Case 5, object 12)

*Themes:* Fascination with the Tudors, Spencer's epic poem 'The Faerie Queene' (1590)

A time of magic, suspicion, persecution, murder, double dealings, execution and torture.

*Suggested literature links:* Edgar Allan Poe 'The Pendulum and the pit' (1842)

#### Gallery 19 and 20 Egypt

*Themes:* Mysteries of 'otherness', Primitivism, Story of Isis and Osiris - the first mummification and the Creation 'Name' of Atum Ra

*Suggested literature links:* Wilkie Collins 'The Moonstone' (1868) and 'The Woman in White' (1859)

## **Gallery 29 and 28 Far Eastern/China**

*Themes:* The intrigue and interest with 'the Orient', Chinese immigration sees the growth of communities in major cities, often references to China town, fascination with Asian religions. Empire and Colonialism.

*Suggested literature links:* Arthur Conan Doyle 'Sherlock Holmes' (1887)

## **Gallery 21 Greek**

*Themes:* Prometheus, life/creation as part of human cultural psyche

*Suggested literature links:* Mary Shelley 'Frankenstein' (1818)

## **The Founders Entrance**

*Themes:* Setting and theatricals and the main building. Also the furniture collection, clocks. Jewellery

*Suggested literature links:* M.R. James was Assistant Director, his study was in the Founders library at the Fitzwilliam, (1886)

## **Gallery 6, 7 and 8 Italy/Spain**

*Themes:* Romance, passion and antiquity

*Suggested literature links:* The Romantic poets Byron, Shelley, Keats and the infamous Italian visit that led to Mary Shelley writing Frankenstein.