

Gothic Literature

What is Gothic Literature?

According to the Glossary of Literary Terms formulated by students at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, “Gothic” can be defined as:

“**Gothic** (goth-IK): a literary style popular during the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. This style usually portrayed **fantastic tales dealing with horror, despair, the grotesque and other “dark” subjects**. Gothic literature was named for the apparent influence of the dark gothic architecture of the period on the genre. Also, many of these Gothic tales took places in such “gothic” surroundings. Other times, this story of darkness may occur in a more everyday setting, such as the quaint house where the man goes mad from the “beating” of his guilt in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.” In essence, these stories were romances, largely due to their love of the **imaginary over the logical**, and were told from many different points of view.”

A Princeton definition also describes Gothic as:

“a genre of literature that combines elements of both **horror and romance**. The effect of Gothic fiction feeds on a **pleasing sort of terror**, an extension of Romantic literary pleasures.”

Tropes

There are many recognizable tropes which crop up in Gothic literature which will help us define what it is:

- Darkness
- Isolation
- Madness – and confusion over what is real or unreal
- Frame Narratives; piecing together rumor, folklore, local history, diaries, letters.
- Superstition
- Dreams and Nightmares
- Ancient castles, ruined abbeys
- Subterranean dungeons
- Secret passageways
- Ghosts
- Graveyards
- Terrifying experiences (pleasurably terrifying)
- Eroticism
- The Church
- Corrupt Churchmen
- Witchcraft, Magic and Occultism
- The Aristocracy

What the Gothic represents

- Popularity
- Commodity
- Historical narrative
- Contemporary politics
- Pleasures of the imagination
- Questions about social class
- Anxieties

Gothic Author Ann Radcliffe (1764 - 1823)

- English author
- Not much is known about her except for her writings, which were extremely popular
- Radcliffe's heroines typically are young, virtuous, curious victims and prisoners
- Her published works include:
 - *Romance of the Forest* 1791
 - Detective-like orphaned Adeline sets out to solve mystery
 - Connections to Catherine from *Northanger Abbey*
 - Gothic elements in this story include:
 - wind
 - curiosity
 - investigation
 - dreams
 - terror
 - secret doors
 - *Mysteries of Udolpho* 1794
 - Gothic elements include:
 - a Gothic castle (Udolpho)
 - terror
 - gossip
 - fear-mongering