GOTHIC LITERATURE

The gothic novel was invented almost single-handedly by Horace Walpole, whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) contains essentially all the elements that constitute the genre. Walpole’s novel was imitated not only in the eighteenth century and not only in the novel form, but it has influenced writing, poetry, and even film making up to the present day. It introduced the term "gothic romance" to the literary world. Due to its inherently supernatural, surreal and sublime elements, it has maintained a dark and mysterious appeal.

However, the roots of the Gothic precede the Gothic works of Horace Walpole. The focus on the grotesque in the medieval period (visible especially in the paintings and architecture of the period) provides a key backdrop against which Gothic must be read, as do the violent and often grotesque tragedies written for the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, with their detailed, almost surgical exploration of the supernatural, vice, corruption, imprisonment, brutality and sexuality, all of which were to provide the very substance of the Gothic authors. (Note particularly ‘Macbeth’ and ‘Dr Faustus’)

Gothic literature is devoted primarily to stories of horror, the fantastic, and the “darker” supernatural forces. These forces often represent the “dark side” of human nature—irrational or destructive desires.

Gothic literature derives its name from its similarities to the Gothic medieval cathedrals, which feature a majestic, unrestrained architectural style with often savage or grotesque ornamentation (the word “Gothic” derives from “Goth,” the name of one of the barbaric Germanic tribes that invaded the Roman Empire). The Gothic genre (in both literature and architecture) is therefore associated with savagery and barbarism.

Generally speaking, gothic literature delves into the macabre nature of humanity in its quest to satisfy mankind’s intrinsic desire to plumb the depths of terror. The key features of gothic texts are:

1) the appearance of the supernatural,
2) the psychology of horror and/or terror,
3) the poetics of the sublime,
4) a sense of mystery and dread,
5) the appealing heroic/villain,
6) the distressed heroine and
7) strong moral closure (usually at least).
ELEMENTS OF THE GOTHIC IN TEXTS

1. Setting in a castle or haunted house. The action takes place in and around an old castle, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The castle often contains secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections. The castle may be near or connected to caves, which lend their own haunting flavour with their branchings, claustrophobia, and mystery. (Translated into modern filmmaking, the setting might be in an old house or mansion--or even a new house--where unusual camera angles, sustained close ups during movement, and darkness or shadows create the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.) It is usually a dwelling that is inhabited by or visited regularly by a ghost or other supposedly supernatural being. Example: Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole’s novel first introduced to gothic literature its single most influential convention, the haunted castle. The castle is the main setting of the story and the centre of activity.

*Cemetery /Graveyard*. A cemetery defines a place which is used for the burial of the dead. Cemeteries are widely used in Gothic Literature as oftentimes frightening places where revenance can occur. Catacombs are especially evocative Gothic spaces because they enable the living to enter below ground a dark labyrinth resonating with the presences and mysteries of the dead.

2. The Weather is used in a number of ways and forms, some of these being:
   - **Mist** - This convention in Gothic Literature is often used to obscure objects (this can be related to the sublime) by reducing visibility or to prelude the insertion of a terrifying person or thing;
   - **Storms** - These frequently accompany important events. Flashes of lightning accompany revelation; thunder and downpours prefigure the appearance of a character or the beginning of a significant event (eg thunder precedes the entrance of the witches in ‘Macbeth’);
   - **Sunlight** - represents goodness and pleasure; it also has the power to bestow these upon characters.

3. An atmosphere of mystery and suspense (or a sense of dread) The work is pervaded by a threatening feeling, a fear enhanced by the unknown. Often the plot itself is built around a mystery, such as unknown parentage, a disappearance, or some other inexplicable event eg. Ghosts walking or a painting coming to life. There may be an ancient prophecy connected with the castle or its inhabitants. It is usually obscure, partial or confusing.

   This serves to captivate the reader and encourage further reading. The atmosphere may also be seen acting upon the protagonists in texts, influencing them by exciting their curiosity or fear.

4. Claustrophobia / Entrapment & Imprisonment:
   A favourite horror device of the Gothic finds a person confined or trapped, such as being shackled to a floor or hidden away in some dark cell or cloister. This sense of there being no way out contributes to the claustrophobic psychology of Gothic space. It consists of an abnormal dread of being confined in a close or narrow space. Often
attributed to actual physical imprisonment or entrapment, claustrophobia can also figure more generally as an indicator of the victim's sense of helplessness or horrified mental awareness of being enmeshed in some dark, inscrutable destiny.

5. **The supernatural** may be intrinsic to the plot. This is generally in the form of some kind of supernatural being or object, such as a vampire, witch, devil or ghost, which is frightening due to its refusal to adhere to the laws of nature, God or man. In 'Macbeth' there are three witches. Dr Faustus communicates with a demon and indirectly with Lucifer. All of 'Paradise Lost' involves the supernatural.

6. **Dreams, omens, portents, visions.** Dreaming is characterised as a form of mental activity that takes place during the act of sleep. Dreams invoke strong emotions within the dreamer, such as ecstasy, joy and terror. Dreams dredge up these deep emotions and premonitions that reflect tellingly upon the dreamer, what one might conceal during waking hours but what emerges in sleep to haunt and arouse the dreamer. It is most likely due to this heightened emotional state that dreams are used so often within Gothic Literature. By invoking dream states within their characters, authors are able to illustrate emotions on a more unmediated and, oftentimes, terrifying level. Dreams reveal to the reader what the character is often too afraid to realise about himself or herself. Dreaming also has an ancient relation with the act of foretelling wherein the future is glimpsed in the dream state. Perhaps the most famous Gothic example of significant dreams occurs in Shelley's 'Frankenstein' after Frankenstein 'awakes' his creature: he falls into a dream state that begins with his kissing of Elizabeth, his love. However, this kiss changes her in the most drastic way as she transforms into the rotting corpse of Caroline, Victor's dead mother. Upon awakening from this horrifying dream, Victor finds himself staring into the face of the monster he has created. Interpretations of this dream lead to explorations of Frankenstein's psyche, relational ability and sexuality.

A character may have a disturbing dream vision, or some phenomenon may be seen as a portent of coming events. For example, if the statue of the lord of the manor falls over, it may portend his death. In modern fiction, a character might see something (a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure) and think that it was a dream. This might be thought of as an "imitation vision." Banquo in 'Macbeth' dreams of the 'weird sisters'. Lady Macbeth's suppressed guilt emerges when she is seen sleepwalking.

7. **The stock characters** of Gothic fiction include tyrants, villains, bandits, maniacs, Byronic heroes, persecuted maidens, femmes fatales, madwomen, magicians, vampires, werewolves, monsters, demons, angel, fallen angel, the beauty and the beast, revenants, ghosts, perambulating skeletons, the Wandering Jew, and the Devil himself.
8. Villain-Hero (Satanic, Promethean, Byronic Hero)

The villain of a story who either 1) poses as a hero at the beginning of the story or 2) simply possesses enough heroic characteristics (charisma, sympathetic past, etc) so that either the reader or the other characters see the villain-hero as more than a simple charlatan or bad guy. Three closely related types exist:

- **Satanic Hero:** a Villain-Hero whose nefarious deeds and justifications of them make him a more interesting character than the rather bland good hero. Example: The origin of this prototype comes from Romantic misreading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whose Satan poets like Blake and Shelley regarded as a far more compelling figure than the moralistic God of Book III of the epic. Gothic examples: Beckford's *Vathek*, Radcliffe's *Montoni*, and just about any vampire.

- **Promethean:** a Villain-Hero who has done good but only by performing an over-reaching or rebellious act. Prometheus from ancient Greek mythology saved mankind but only after stealing fire and ignoring Zeus' order that mankind should be kept in a state of subjugation. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is tellingly subtitled the "Modern Prometheus." Consider whether Dr Faustus is a Promethean hero. (*The vaulting arches and spires of Gothic cathedrals reach wildly to the sky as if the builders were trying to grasp the heavens, an ambition for the eternal that is likewise expressed in many works of Gothic literature (consider Manfred's quest for supernatural power in Byron's poem, or Frankenstein's quest to become godlike by creating life or Dr.Faustus pact - offering his soul for 24 years of power)."

- **Byronic Hero:** a later variation of the "antithetically mixed" Villain-Hero. Aristocratic, suave, moody, handsome, solitary, secretive, brilliant, cynical, sexually intriguing, and nursing a secret wound, he is renowned because of his fatal attraction for female characters and readers and continues to occasion debate about gender issues. Example: Byron's *Childe Harold* and, more gothically, Manfred are the best examples, but this darkly attractive and very conflicted male figure surfaces everywhere in the 19th and 20th century gothic eg Heathcliff or Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Byron himself was described as "mad, bad and dangerous to know."

The Byronic hero in literature and life:

A. Robin Hood
B. Richard III
C. Iago
D. Faust/ Dr.Faustus
E. Milton's Satan
F. Victor Frankenstein
G. Frankenstein's Creature
H. Dracula
I. Byron's Manfred
J. Cain
9. The Pursued Protagonist
This refers to the idea of a pursuing force that relentlessly acts in a severely negative manner on a character. This persecution often implies the notion of some sort of a curse or other form of terminal and utterly unavoidable damnation, a notion that usually suggests a return or "hangover" of traditional religious ideology to chastise the character for some real or imagined wrong against the moral order. The Wandering Jew is perhaps the archetypically pursued/pursuing protagonist.
--Drew McCray

10. Pursuit of the Heroine
This is the pursuit of a virtuous and idealistic (and usually poetically inclined) young woman by a villain, normally portrayed as a wicked, older but still potent aristocrat. While in many early Gothic novels such a chase occurs across a Mediterranean forest and/or through a subterranean labyrinth, the pursuit of the heroine is by no means limited to these settings. This pursuit represents a threat to the young lady's ideals and morals (usually meaning her virginity), to which the heroine responds in the early works with a passive courage in the face of danger; later gothic heroines progressively become more active and occasionally effective in their attempts to escape this pursuit and indict patriarchy. (eg. Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber'.)

Women in distress. As an appeal to the pathos and sympathy of the reader, the female characters often face events that leave them fainting, terrified, screaming, and/or sobbing. A lonely, pensive, and oppressed heroine is often the central figure of the novel, so her sufferings are even more pronounced and the focus of attention. The women suffer all the more because they are often abandoned, left alone (either on purpose or by accident), and have no protector at times.

Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male. One or more male characters has the power, as king, lord of the manor, father, or guardian, to demand that one or more of the female characters do something intolerable. The woman may be commanded to marry someone she does not love (it may even be the powerful male himself), or commit a crime.
11. **The Outsider**: The one theme that cuts through virtually all Gothic is that of the "outsider," embodied in wanderers like Frankenstein’s creature. Gothic fiction is concerned with the outsider, whether the stationary figure who represses his difference, or the wandering figure who seeks for some kind of salvation, or else the individual who for whatever reason moves entirely outside the norm. In any event, he is beyond the moderating impulses in society, and he must be punished for his transgression. He is gloomy and melancholy, full of self-pity and self-hatred. Like Cain, he is the perpetual outsider, marked by his appearance, doomed to wander the four corners of the earth, alone and reviled. It may be argued that Frankenstein himself becomes an outsider as he grows more and more like his creation. While the society at large always appears bourgeois in its culture and morality, the Gothic outsider is a counterforce driven by strange longings and destructive needs. While everyone else appears sane, he is insane; while everyone else appears bound by legalities, he is trying to snap the pitiless constrictions of the law; while everyone else seems to lack any peculiarities of taste or behaviour, he feels only estrangement, sick longings, terrible surges of power and devastation. Take for example, Heathcliff in 'Wuthering Heights'.

12. **Possession** The popularity of belief in demonic possession seems to have originated within Christian Theology during the Middle Ages. During this time, Christians lived in fear concerning the war being waged between God and the Devil over every mortal soul. Hence, this fear of possession seemed to culminate into an act that could be viewed by the mortal eye. This act is defined as the forced possession of a mortal body by the Devil or one of his demons. There are two types of possession and either can be voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary possession seems to involve a willing exchange in the form of some compact between evil spirit and mortal, often involving wealth, power or goods (eg. The pact Faustus makes); involuntary possession occurs when the devil randomly selects an unwitting host. The two types of possession consist of the transference of the Devil or demon directly into the mortal body or the sending of the Devil or demon into the body by a third party, usually a mortal dabbler in the dark arts. Following the act, the possessed is said to show many symptoms including abnormal strength, personality changes, fits, convulsions, bodily odours resembling sulphur, lewd and lascivious actions, the ability to levitate, the ability to speak in tongues or the ability to foretell future events. Many religions acknowledge the act of possession still today, most notably the Catholic Church. There seem to be three ways in which to end a possession.

13. **Revenance**

This is the return of the dead to terrorise or to settle some score with the living.

14. **Revenge**

Revenge is characterized as the act of repaying someone for a harm that the person has caused; the idea also points back generically to one of the key influences upon Gothic literature: the revenge tragedies of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Revenge may be enacted upon a loved one, a family member, a friend, an object or even an area.
Gothic Literature, revenge is notably prominent and can be enacted by or upon mortals as well as spirits. Revenge can take many forms, such as harm to body, harm to loved ones, and harm to family. The most Gothic version of revenge in Gothic Literature is the idea that it can be a guiding force in the revenance of the dead.

15. **Unreliable Narrator**
A narrator tells a story and determines the story's point of view. An unreliable narrator, however, does not understand the importance of a particular situation or makes an incorrect conclusion or assumption about an event that he/she witnesses. An important issue in determining the **The Turn of the Screw**.

16. **Multiple Narrative/Spiral Narrative Method** The story is frequently told through a series of secret manuscripts or multiple tales, each revealing a deeper secret, so the narrative gradually spirals inward toward the hidden truth. The narrator is often a first-person narrator compelled to tell the story to a fascinated or captive listener (representing the captivating power of forbidden knowledge). (Note 'Wuthering Heights')

17. **High, even overwrought emotion.** The narration may be highly sentimental, and the characters are often overcome by anger, sorrow, surprise, and especially, terror. Characters suffer from raw nerves and a feeling of impending doom. Crying and emotional speeches are frequent. Breathlessness and panic are common. In the filmed gothic, screaming is common.

18. **The Sublime:** The definition of this key term has long been a contested term, but the idea of the sublime is essential to an understanding of Gothic poetics and, especially, the attempt to defend or justify the literature of terror. Put basically (and this really is basic - a fuller understanding of the Sublime would be useful to students of Wordsworth or any Gothic Literature), the Sublime is an overpowering sense of the greatness and power of nature, which can be uplifting, awe-inspiring and terrifying, caused by experience of beauty, vastness or grandeur. Sublime moments lead us to consider the place of humanity in the universe, and the power exhibited in the world.

19. **Darkness as intrinsic to humanity:** Generally speaking, gothic literature delves into the macabre nature of humanity in its quest to satiate mankind's intrinsic desire to plumb the depths of terror.

20. **Necromancy** This is the black art of communicating with the dead. This is usually done to obtain information about the future, but can also be used for other purposes, such as getting the dead to perform deeds of which humans are not capable. The conjurer often stood in a circle, such as a pentagram, in order to protect himself from the dead spirit, yet he was often overpowered by the spirit. Examples: The most famous examples of necromancy can be found in literary renditions of the Faust legend, from Marlowe to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Byron with his *Manfred*. In these works, Faust not only speaks with the devil in order to strike a deal but
necromantically invokes various dead, famous figures from the past for his amusement and edification.

21. **Blood** - This is a prominent symbol in Gothic works often intimating the paradox of the human condition: blood can represent both life and death, or both guilt (e.g., murder) and innocence (e.g., redemptive blood). Consider references to blood in 'Macbeth', Byron's *Manfred* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

22. **Marriage as Resolution**: The importance of marriage in this scheme cannot be overstated. Not only does movement toward matrimony in the Gothic’s present trigger the appearance of the buried past, but that buried past itself always contains information tied to the institutions of matrimony or family interest.

23. **Sadism**: The word “sadism” was coined to describe the writings of Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, the Marquis de Sade. Sadism is a sexual perversion where one person gains gratification by inflicting physical or mental pain on others. It can also mean a delight in torment or excessive cruelty. (Heathcliff in 'Wuthering Heights' / or the husband in 'The Bloody Chamber'.

24. **Strong Moral Closure**: If de Sade is to be believed, the Gothic genre arose as a response to the brutality and bloodiness of Romantic society, and it as part of this response that Gothic fiction usually contains a strong moral.

25. **The metonymy of gloom and horror**: Metonymy is a subtype of metaphor, in which something (like rain) is used to stand for something else (like sorrow). For example, the film industry likes to use metonymy as a quick shorthand, so we often notice that it is raining in funeral scenes. Note that the following metonymies for "doo and gloom" all suggest some element of mystery, danger, or the supernatural.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>风，尤其是嚎叫</th>
<th>风，尤其是嚎叫</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>door, especially howling</td>
<td>doors grating on rusty hinges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>footsteps approaching</td>
<td>lights in abandoned rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characters trapped in a room</td>
<td>ruins of buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thunder and lightning</td>
<td>rain, especially blowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sighs, moans, howls, eerie sounds</td>
<td>clanking chains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gusts of wind blowing out lights

doors suddenly slamming shut

baying of distant dogs (or wolves?)
crazed laughter

26. The vocabulary of the gothic. The constant use of the appropriate vocabulary set creates the atmosphere of the gothic. Here as an example are some of the words (in several categories) that help make up the vocabulary of the gothic in *The Castle of Otranto*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mystery</th>
<th>diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, spectre, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear, Terror, or Sorrow</td>
<td>afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadly, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haste</td>
<td>anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>anger, angrily, choler, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largeness</td>
<td>enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. **Elements of Romance**  In addition to the standard gothic aspects, many gothic novels contain elements of romance as well. Elements of romance include these:

- **Powerful love.** Heart stirring, often sudden, emotions create a life or death commitment. Many times this love is the first the character has felt with this overwhelming power.
- **Uncertainty of reciprocation.** What is the beloved thinking? Is the lover's love returned or not?
- **Unreturned love.** Someone loves in vain (at least temporarily). Later, the love may be returned.
- **Tension between true love and father's control, disapproval, or choice.** Most often, the father of the woman disapproves of the man she loves.
- **Lovers parted.** Some obstacle arises and separates the lovers, geographically or in some other way. One of the lovers is banished, arrested, forced to flee, locked in a dungeon, or sometimes, disappears without explanation. Or, an explanation may be given (by the person opposing the lovers' being together) that later turns out to be false.

**Gothicism:** In literary criticism this refers to works characterised by a taste for the medieval or morbidly attractive. A gothic novel prominently features elements of horror, the supernatural, gloom, and violence: clanking chains, terror, charnel houses, ghosts, medieval castles, and mysteriously slamming doors. The term "gothic novel" is also applied to novels that lack elements of the traditional Gothic setting but that create a similar atmosphere of terror or dread. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is perhaps the best-known English work of this kind.

**Grotesque**

1. This term originated from oddly shaped ornaments found within Roman dwellings, or grottoes, during the first century. From a literary standpoint, this term implies a mutation of the characters, plants and/or animals. This mutation transforms the normal features and/or behaviours into veritable extremes that are meant to be frightening and/or disturbingly comic (Cornwell 273).

2. The term grotesque also defines a work in which two separate modes, comedy and tragedy, are mixed. The result is a disturbing fiction wherein comic circumstances prelude horrific tragedy and vice versa.