

Gothic Literature

- Images, themes and settings that recall Medieval Europe
- Typified by romance, love, innocence, and beauty contrasted with crime, temptation, and sin
- Contrasts of innocence vs. debauchery (or sinfulness), light vs. darkness
- Often involves a mystery, curse, or secret
- Frequently features monsters or ghosts, with spiritual or supernatural overtones
- Often has a brooding tone or sinister themes and psychological terror
- Known as a “dark genre” of literature

Don't Miss This

The Gothic genre became popular during the mid-1700s through the late 1800s. Not coincidentally, this was the time called, “The Age of Reason,” in which Western culture began to turn away from its Judeo-Christian roots and began to worship human reasoning. It was during this time that philosophers, authors, artists, naturalists, and others began to remove God’s divine truth and power from their depictions and explanations of human nature, pain and tragedy, the origins of the universe, eternal life, sin, and the meaning of life.

As people turned from God and toward themselves, art descended from great works depicting the glory of God’s creation to ever more chaotic, messy artworks that pointed the viewer to the painter (his perspective, his struggle, his mind) rather than God. Likewise, literature began to become darker, more sinister, and frightening. It was during this time that the Gothic, Thriller, Horror, and more sensual genres emerged, mirroring and glorifying man’s lack of self-control, fascination with sin, and fear of evil, rather than the previous genres that glorified strength, faithfulness, chivalry, beauty, courage, etc.

Gothic literature continued to command a large readership well into the 19th century, first as Romantic authors such as Sir Walter Scott (*The Tapestry Chamber*, 1829) adopted Gothic conventions, then later as Victorian writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1886) and Bram Stoker (*Dracula*, 1897) incorporated Gothic motifs in their stories of horror and suspense.

Elements of Gothic fiction are prevalent in several of the acknowledged classics of 19th-century literature, including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831 in French), and many of the tales written by Edgar Allan Poe such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843).

Also popularized today, especially in Young Adult literature (the *Twilight* series, *Harry Potter*, *Interview with the Vampire*)