Gothic fiction (Literary genre)

Definition: **Gothic novel** from *Philip’s Encyclopedia*

Genre of English fiction popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Gothic novels often rely on eerie medieval externals, such as old castles, monasteries and hidden trapdoors, for their symbolism. Horace Walpole wrote an important prototype, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Later examples include *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe and *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley.

Summary Article: **gothic novel**

from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Literary genre established by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and marked by mystery, violence, and horror; other pre-20th century practitioners were the English writers Ann Radcliffe, Matthew 'Monk' Lewis, Mary Shelley, the Irish writer Bram Stoker, and the US writer Edgar Allen Poe. The late 20th century has seen a huge revival in interest in the genre, particularly in film, and the novels of the US writer Stephen King are carefully crafted examples.

The gothic is best distinguished from horror by gothic's inbuilt morality. Whilst there are macabre and violent acts, no one dies unjustly in a true gothic novel. The vampire or creature unleashed is a scourge to test the righteous and bring weakness, evil, and folly to account. A plot requirement is one or two ordinary people, with whom the reader identifies, who survive and record events (for example, Jonathan Harker in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, 1818). Evil is ultimately destroyed and has beneficial consequences for the gothic novel in terms of character development.

The gothic became so popular in the 19th century that it was incorporated into works of other genres. Wilkie Collins employed gothic conventions in his mystery novel *The Woman in White* (1860) and Arthur Conan Doyle did likewise with his detective fiction in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). Jane Austen satirized the gothic novel in *Northanger Abbey* (1818).

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