

Gothic Literature

American Gothic Literature

- *Gothic* refers to the use of medieval, wild, or mysterious elements in literature.
- Gothic literature features gloomy settings and horrifying events.
- Edgar Allan Poe is generally regarded as the American master of Gothic writing.



American Gothic Literature

Themes

- Family structure
- Violence
- Unreliable narrators
- Wrongdoings
- Religion
- The grotesque

American Gothic Literature

- The term *Gothic* has also been extended to represent a type of fiction which lacks the medieval setting but-
 - develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom or terror
 - represents events which are uncanny or macabre
 - contains violent events
 - deals with psychological states

American Gothic Literature

- The settings for these pieces of literature could be in any time period.

Elements of the Gothic Novel

- An atmosphere of mystery and suspense.
- An ancient prophecy
- Omens, portents, visions
- Supernatural or otherwise inexplicable events
- High, tense emotion
- Women in distress
- Women threatened by a powerful, impulsive, tyrannical male
- gloom and horror

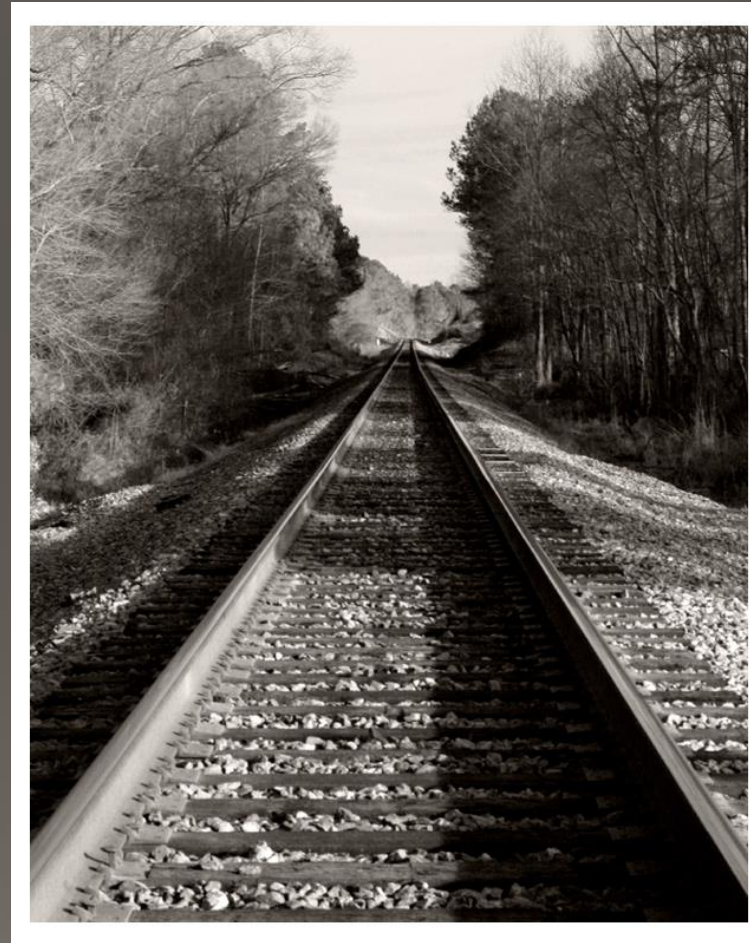
Gothic Movement in America

- The Gothic Tradition was firmly established in Europe before American writers had made names for themselves.
 - Novels such as *Frankenstein* were popular.
- By the 19th century, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and other writers were using the Gothic elements in their writing.

Southern Gothic Literature

Southern Gothic Literature

- Sub-genre of the Gothic style
- Unique to American literature
 - relies on supernatural, ironic, or unusual events to guide the plot
- explores social issues and reveals the cultural character of the American South.



Southern Gothic Literature

- Southern Gothic literature is full of doom and gloom for a reason: it totally developed in the wake of the Civil War (1861-1865).
- The Civil War, which brought an end to slavery in the South, left behind it a society that was devastated, economically and socially.
- The Civil War forced Southern writers—many of whom were born in the aftermath of the war—to really think about what it meant to be Southern.

Southern Gothic Literature

- Southern Gothic literature raises issues like:
 - Why is violence such a huge part of Southern culture?
 - How did the South's history of slavery and racial oppression change Southern society?
 - Why did the South have such a hard time picking itself up after its defeat in the war?

Background

- Takes classic Gothic archetypes, such as the monster or the heroic knight, and turns them into American Southerners
 - a spiteful, reclusive spinster; an uneducated drunk
 - a quiet, wise lawyer
- Most notable feature is the *grotesque*
 - a character whose negative qualities allow the author to highlight unpleasant aspects in Southern culture.
- Something in the town or the house is bizarre and often falling apart



Other Specific Features of Southern Gothic

- Freakishness
- Outsider
- Imprisonment
- Violence
- Sense of Place
- Broken bodies, minds, souls

Sense of Place

- You can't read a Southern Gothic novel without understanding what a Southern town "feels" like:
 - old small towns
 - Old downtown with stately but worn-down buildings



Characteristics

- Good versus evil in characters
- Setting and atmosphere evoke vivid emotional response
 - Setting symbolizes the end of an era
- Personal and community experience
- Emphasis of history

Explores

- Relationships between races and genders
 - Treatment of African Americans and women
 - Love that is not returned
- The corruption and decay of the South
- Distorted religious views
- Clash between those with power and those without
- Isolation of individual

Explores

- Humans' powerlessness in an indifferent universe
- Moral decay of community
- Burden of history
- Horrors of human's treatment of each other

