

Literary Terms and Definitions

GOTHIC: The word *Gothic* originally only referred to the Goths, one of the Germanic tribes that helped destroy Rome. Their now-extinct language, also called Gothic, died out completely. The term later came to signify "Germanic," then "medieval," especially in reference to the medieval architecture and art used in western Europe between 1100 and 1500 CE. (The earlier art and architecture of medieval Europe between 700-1100 CE is known as "Romanesque.") Characteristics of Gothic architecture include the pointed arch and vault, the flying buttress, stained glass, and the use of **gargoyles** and **grotesques** fitted into the nooks and crannies unoccupied by images of saints and biblical figures. A grotesque refers to a stone carving of a monstrous or mythical creature either in two dimensions or full-relief, but which does not contain a pipe for transferring rainwater. A gargoyle is a full-relief stone carving with an actual pipe running through it, so that rainwater will flow through it and out of a water-spout in its mouth. Manuscripts from the Gothic period of art likewise have strange monsters and fantastical creatures depicted in the margins of the page, and elaborate vine-work or leaf-work painted along the borders. The term has come to be used much more loosely to refer to gloomy or frightening literature. Contrast with **horror story**, **Gothic literature** and **Gothic novel** (below).

GOTHIC LITERATURE: Poetry, short stories, or novels designed to thrill readers by providing mystery and blood-curdling accounts of villainy, murder, and the supernatural. As J. A. Cuddon suggests, the conventions of gothic literature include wild and desolate landscapes, ancient buildings such as ruined monasteries; cathedrals; castles with dungeons, torture chambers, secret doors, and winding stairways; apparitions, phantoms, demons, and necromancers; an atmosphere of brooding gloom; and youthful, handsome heroes and fainting (or screaming!) heroines who face off against corrupt aristocrats, wicked witches, and hideous monsters. Conventionally, female characters are threatened by powerful or impetuous male figures, and description functions through a metonymy of fear by presenting details designed to evoke horror, disgust, or terror (see Cuddon's discussion, 381-82).

The term *Gothic* originally was applied to a tribe of Germanic barbarians during the dark ages and their now-extinct language, but eventually historians used it to refer to the gloomy and impressive style of medieval architecture common in Europe, hence "Gothic Castle" or "Gothic Architecture." The term became associated with ghost stories and horror novels because early Gothic novels were often associated with the Middle Ages and with things "wild, bloody, and barbarous of long ago" as J. A. Cuddon puts it in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms* (381). See **Gothic**, above, and **Gothic novel**, below.

GOTHIC NOVEL: A type of **romance** wildly popular between 1760 up until the 1820s that has influenced the ghost story and horror story. The stories are designed to thrill readers by providing mystery and blood-curdling accounts of villainy, murder, and the supernatural. As J. A. Cuddon suggests, the conventions include wild and desolate landscapes; ancient buildings such as ruined monasteries, cathedrals, and castles with dungeons, torture chambers, secret doors, and winding stairways; apparitions such as phantoms, demons, and necromancers; an atmosphere of brooding gloom; and youthful, handsome heroes and fainting (or screaming!) heroines who face off against corrupt aristocrats, wicked witches, and hideous monsters. Conventionally, female characters are threatened by powerful or impetuous male figures, and description functions

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Alternatively, the label *gothic* may have come about because Horace Walpole, one of the early writers, wrote his works in a *faux* medieval castle). The best known early example is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Later British writers in the Gothic tradition include "Monk" Lewis, Charles Maturin, William Beckford, Ann Radcliffe, and Mary Shelley. American Gothic writers include Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe. Famous novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are also considered gothic novels. In modern cartoons, *Scooby Doo* would also fall into the category of mock gothic drama in animated form. Gothic novels are also called **gothic romances**.