



Dark Romanticism: Gothic Literature

Romanticism Recap

Remember, Romanticism does not mean “romance.” Romanticism was an intellectual, artistic, and philosophical **movement** that included art, music, literature!

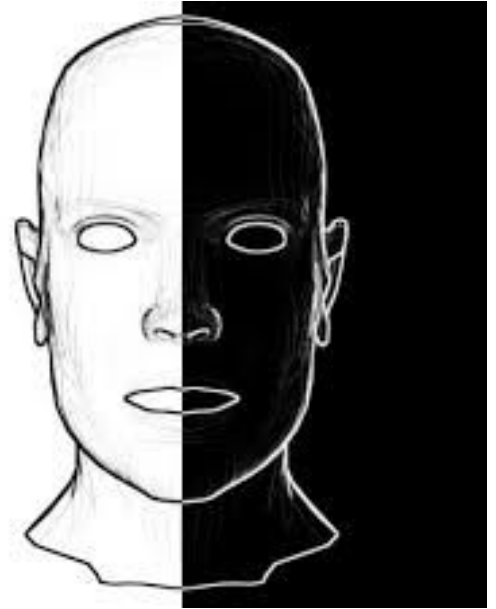
Began as a reaction to and against the Industrial Revolution, **Age of Enlightenment**, and the new scientific approach to nature.

Romanticism valued extreme emotions, **intuition**, nature, imagination, and **expression** (over rational thought and logic that was emphasized during the Enlightenment/Rationalism)

Two Branches of Romanticism

Transcendentalism and Gothic Romanticism are both **subsets** (different branches) of the Romantic movement.

Similarities: Like Romanticism, Transcendentalists and Gothic Romantics emphasize emotion, imagination, nature, and the supernatural (**things not proven by science**). They also both view society as a source of corruption and they desire to escape.



Two Sides of the Same Coin

Despite coming from the same movement, Transcendentalism and Gothic Romanticism have many differences:

Again, both movements emphasized **escapism**--but while Transcendentalists wanted to escape into nature, Gothic Romantics wanted to escape into the depths of the **human mind**.

While Transcendentalists thought people were inherently good, Gothic Romantics explored the darker side of **human nature**.

If Transcendentalism is the **light**, Gothic Romanticism is the **dark**.

Exploring the Dark...



IT LEAPT TOWARDS HIM UPON THE INSTANT.

Gothic literature explores intuition, imagination, and emotions in a different way. Gothic writers wanted to know: What happens when man gives in to his wicked instincts, the darkest depths of his imagination, his true “**inner nature**”?

Some critics and psychologists say Gothic Romanticism fills a legitimate human need to be **frightened**--to safely explore the darker sides of our personalities that cannot be acted upon in **society**.

Common Gothic Elements

Mystery/Suspense: Gothic Romantics were some of the first authors to incorporate mystery into their works.

Gothic stories always keep the readers on their toes by building suspense through mystery. Readers at the time were horrified and **enthralled**--they wanted to know what exactly was behind that shimmering veil, who put out the candles, where exactly that wailing was coming from, and if the house really was “haunted” (hint: it almost always was).



Common Gothic Elements

Setting as a Character: Creepy forests, rotting houses, underground passageways, castles at the top of a hill - just your friendly Gothic neighborhood! And often, the setting in Gothic stories play a large part in the plot. Sometimes, the setting seems to be alive in how it can affect the characters emotionally, mentally, and sometimes physically.

Melodrama & Sensationalism: Melodrama plays took off in the 18th century and gave us a whole boatload of shared cultural images: that hand fluttering to the heart when shocked; the exaggerated lip-bite when confused; the wringing of the hands when worried. It's all melodrama. This type of over-the-top emotional gesturing was a trend people actually paid to go see--live.

Melodrama!



Part of the addictive allure of Gothic novels is their ability to meld two distinct stylistic elements: melodrama from theater and sensationalism (the use of exciting or **shocking** stories to provoke **interest**) from contemporary novels.

Both elements were harshly ridiculed by critics at the time who considered Gothic novels in general to be **low brow**, but Gothic novels that offered you excessive emotion (melodrama) and made your heart pound (sensationalism) sold like hotcakes.

Common Gothic Elements

Supernatural & the Sublime: Vampires, ghosts, demons and other monsters got their big break in Gothic novels...and the world never looked back. In fact, absolutely no true Gothic tale would be complete without the supernatural.

Some authors wrote about **physical** monsters (Dracula, Frankenstein, Mr. Hyde), while others wrote about **psychological** terrors that suggested otherworldly threats (people going insane is a common one). Other authors blended the two and wrote stories that could equally be interpreted as supernatural interference or the narrator going “crazy”.

Beyond the fun of playing with the supernatural, Gothic authors wanted to reach an emotional state they called the **sublime** - an indescribable feeling of terror or joy.

Common Gothic Elements

The Fallen Hero: Gothic authors were the first to introduce the concept of the **anti-hero** - an imperfect, sometimes morally questionable character who acts as the “hero” or main character the reader is meant to root for

The Gothic hero was similar to the typical Romantic hero in that he follows his instincts and his own moral code. Unlike the Romantic hero, however, the Gothic hero is not always innocent or pure - sometimes, the Gothic hero is hiding a **dark secret** of his own...

Common Gothic Elements

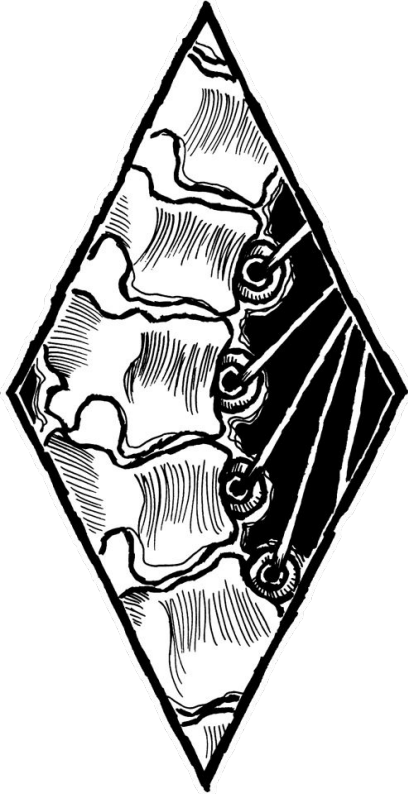
Isolation: Gothic literature also focuses on the individual. Unlike the Transcendentalists, however, who focus on the connection between individuals (individuals = part of the greater whole), Gothics focus on the isolation of the individual.

Typically, the hero is separated from society **physically**, (either kidnapped, lost, or trapped in a spooky place) as well as **emotionally** or **psychologically** in some way.

Because of this, there is typically a mental as well as physical danger found in Gothic stories.



Common Gothic Elements



Fatalism: Fatalism, or the idea that our fate is **predetermined** and humans have no control over their own destinies, is a common element of Gothic literature. Often characters are doomed to their fates, no matter what actions they might take to prevent it.